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THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND THE LIFE OF TO-DAY



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THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND THE LIFE OF TO-DAY

BY

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AUTHOR OF "KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN JOHANNINE THOUGHT" AND "PAUL THE CONQUEROR"

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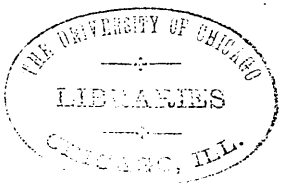
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TO

E. W. L.

FOREWORD

THE impetus to write this book came from conversations with friends who, because they knew of my interest in the Fourth Gospel, shared with me their concern about its place in their thinking. The questions were such as these: "Does the modern criticism of the Gospel of John mean that I cannot believe it any more?" "If Jesus did not actually speak the great 'I am' discourses attributed to him in the Gospel of John, what as a result must happen to our faith in him?" It is in the hope of serving people who have questions like this that this book has been written. I shall be happy if it can have any part in helping the Gospel to take its rightful place in Christian experience to-day.

It would be impossible to express the indebtedness that I feel to those who have given me guidance and stimulation in my study, but I must record my gratitude both to my students and to my teachers, whose thinking has been my challenge and my inspiration. To Professor Harold R. Willoughby of the University

of Chicago I owe special thanks for his reading of one of the chapters, and for his valuable suggestions regarding it.

M. E. L.

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THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND THE LIFE OF TO-DAY

THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND THE LIFE OF TO-DAY

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM OF THE GOSPEL FOR THE MODERN READER

THE Fourth Gospel has not yet come into its own. Perhaps there is no place in the field of literary criticism where there is a better illustration than here of the truth of the adage, "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing." Those who are interested at all in the findings of Biblical criticism know that this Gospel cannot be classed with the first three as a work whose purpose is primarily historical. But a question inevitably arises as a result. If the book is not to be used as a source for historical knowledge of the life of Jesus, how is it to be used?

In the old days, before Gospel criticism had reached the public ear to any considerable extent, the book was used indiscriminately with the others, and

men found in its great poetic passages some of their most satisfying pictures of Jesus' life on earth. Now that doubt has been cast upon the authenticity of its chronology, of its presentation of the works and the words of Jesus, many find themselves puzzled as to the use of the Gospel at all. If the great discourses on the bread and water of life, the allegory of the vine and the branches, the farewell prayer of Jesus are not verbatim records of his words, how can they be assimilated to our total thought and become useful for our interpretation of Jesus and his message for the life of to-day? Can they, after scholarship has done its full work, remain serviceable to us at all?

Now this is a question which many fear to put lest its answer may deprive them of one of the most treasured possessions of our religious heritage. And no wonder. From the days of Clement of Alexandria, who wrote that this was a "spiritual gospel," down to our own time when Professor Drummond has characterized it as a work of "tender and unearthly beauty," men and women have turned to this book for inspiration, for insight into life, and for moral guidance. Children have been given their first picture of a loving God through its phrasing: "God so

loved the world that he gave his only begotten son." Men have come into a realization of the adequacy of religion for a daily, work-a-day experience, of religion as food for life through its interpretation of Jesus as the bread and the water of life. Worship has been seen in its true light in this Gospel's word that God is spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. Moods of exaltation have found expression in its affirmation of the radiance of religion: "I am the light of the world." Lonely folk have seen religion offering them comradeship in Jesus' saying: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep." Religion's call to the larger and fuller life is made winsome to men in Jesus' thought of his own mission: "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly." Experiences of supreme dedication are at home in its language: "For their sakes I sanctify myself that they also may be sanctified." And more than all these, it answers humanity's deepest and most solemn need in its words of comfort and reassurance about life after death. "I am the resurrection and the life . . . Let not your heart be troubled . . . In my Father's house are many mansions . . . I go to prepare a place for you." Out of

affliction men have cried out for comfort, and it is in these words that they have found healing.

The Fourth Gospel has so built itself into the life of men, that there is real reluctance to let it go. In fact there is little chance that sayings such as these, by which men have lived, will be allowed to be forgotten. In or out of their context they will continue to be used for spiritual nurture as they have been used in the past. But the dilemma lies here: once the historicity of the Gospel has been called in question, as Biblical criticism seems to do, there is certain loss in its usefulness, unless the problem is followed through to the end, and one really finds the constructive solution which scholarship is able to give. If the sayings that are so dear are used merely as isolated gems of thought, apart from their context, they lose backing and hence significance. If they are used in their context, as they most surely ought to be, they bring a host of questions about their authenticity, the answers to which are not readily accessible to the average reader.

The real solution of the problem lies in a fuller understanding of the purpose of the Gospel than is generally prevalent to-day. There is no solution in using it indiscriminately with the Synoptics, no solu-

tion in holding it as a competitor with them. The only chance of a real understanding of it, and an assimilation of its riches to our total thought lies in our fuller understanding of its own intention and an interpretation of it in the light of its own avowed purpose. And if we go back of the purpose which led the author to write the Gospel to the world of thought in which he lived, the world of religious ideas which caused such a purpose to come into being, we are still further helped into the understanding of the Gospel. We see it then not as an alternative record to the Synoptics of the events of Jesus' life, not as a mere depository of beautiful and poetic sayings, but as a synthetic interpretation of religion, with a peculiar significance for to-day, because so many of the factors which produced the need for such a synthesis as it gives are present in our own world of thought.

The objective of our study then is such an orientation into the world of thought from which the Gospel sprang as will show its place in its own time, and help us to interpret it for to-day. Scholarship has made available much that allows a reconstruction of the world that produced the Gospel, but this material has not been appropriated by those most to be bene-

fited by it, those who love the Gospel and want to use it, but who feel baffled by the many questions which a little knowledge of its origin has raised.

Our study should attempt an examination of the Gospel itself, in the light of its own stated purpose, to see how it differentiates itself from the Synoptics and how consequently it should be differently used. It should attempt to set forth what is known about the religious background of the author. It should try to make some analysis of the interpretation of Christianity which this Gospel gives, its remarkable synthesis of ethical, philosophical, and mystical religion, its assimilation of Jewish, Greek, and Christian elements into a fusion, which was still not merely a fusion, but the work of a creative genius, transforming the old conceptions into a new spiritual unity of thought, and creating a fresh and more spiritual type of Christianity. It should attempt also some gathering together of the complex threads of modern religious thought in order to show the peculiar adequacy of the Fourth Gospel for our own age, its striking adaptation to the needs of this day.

For such a purpose it is not necessary to go over again the evidence upon which theories of authorship have been built up. It is the temper of wise criticism

which expresses itself in Professor Carpenter's words in his *The Johannine Writings*: "I have no clue to the secret of this rare and lofty genius any more than anyone else, and I can offer you no solution of the mystery of its composition." In spite of voluminous works upon the question, the identity of the author of the Fourth Gospel still remains a mystery, and until some new data comes to light it must remain so.[1] Conjectures are all that can be offered when evidence is as inconclusive as it is upon this point, and we need not go further here than to say that opinions are converging upon the position that the author of the Gospel was not the Apostle John, that he wrote from Ephesus, and that it was probably in the first or second decade of the second century that he wrote this work.[2]

[1] Two recent studies which bear upon the origin and authorship of the Gospel are: Streeter, *The Four Gospels,* Part III, and Carpenter, *The Johannine Writings,* pp. 191-208.

[2] It should be noted here that a number of recent interpreters of the Gospel, notably Canon Burney in his *Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel,* have advanced the theory that the Gospel was written originally in Aramaic. Such a theory would suggest some other place of composition for the Gospel than Ephesus, perhaps Palestine, perhaps North Syria. Mr. G. R. Driver of Magdalen College, Oxford, in an article in the *Jewish Guardian* for January 5 and 12, 1923, answers Professor Burney and shows, I think conclusively, that the so-called "mistranslations" of Aramaic, upon which Professor Burney bases his argument can be as well referred to misinterpretation of spoken words as to mistranslation

For the aims of this study, which are practical rather than critical, it is not so important to be able to name the author as it is to understand the task which he undertook and the genius which he brought to bear upon that task. Our interest lies not so much in who he was as in what he did. In the critical period of transition in which the Christian movement found itself at the beginning of the second century, this author was able to see the values that lay in the historic grounding of Christianity, at the same time that he grasped the need for meeting with flexibility the wider ranges of speculative thought. He recognized also that the practical emphases of the Judaistic elements in Christianity needed as complement a more mystical interpretation of religion. He realized too that this mystical component must not fail to be balanced by the ethical motive of love toward the fellow members of the beloved community, lest it should tend to introspectiveness or abnormality of life. He had the insight to grasp the eternal meanings in both the teaching and the personality of Jesus, and the poetic genius which en-

of a written document. The author might then be one who naturally *thought* in Aramaic, but he need not have written in that language. If this is the case there is no need for changing our usually accepted view of the place of composition.

abled him to express those meanings in language of such irresistible beauty that for eighteen centuries it has furnished men with their medium for the expression of their highest life. This was a unique task not only for the time of the Gospel's production, but for Christian history—unique in conception and in execution. Into a fuller understanding of his environment, and a clearer discernment of his motives, and hence into a more intelligent appreciation of his achievement, it is the aim of this study to enter.

CHAPTER II

THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND THE SYNOPTICS

THE grouping of the first three Gospels under the title of "Synoptic" has been done on a basis of their inherent likeness, and evident relationship to each other. Some theory of literary dependence among these three biographies, with Mark as the middle term between Matthew and Luke, seems an inescapable conclusion to be drawn from the examination of their similarities in plan, in selection of event, and in actual wording. Whatever theory of relationship one adopts must take full account of genuine individuality in each writing and must not lose sight of the distinctive purposes of each; for example, Mark's swiftness and vigor of narration, in presenting a Jesus who is unmistakably the unique Son of God, Luke's interest in the inner life of Jesus and in the humanitarian aspects of his teaching and ministry, and Matthew's obvious desire to connect Jesus with the historic stream of Jewish thought, and to show him the fulfillment of the Law and the

Prophets. Such individual interests, such peculiarities of thought and style, help us to picture the personalities behind these remarkable writings and enable us at least partially to envisage the circumstances which brought the Gospels into being, but they do not deny the interdependence in origin which their similarities imply.

When we come to examine the Fourth Gospel, however, the distinctive characteristics are so many and of such a nature as to demand a separate classification of the Gospel. In so fundamental a matter as the structure and plan of the narrative, it differs radically from the first three. The Synoptic Gospels have presented the ministry of Jesus with a plan that is partly chronological and partly geographical. After an introduction telling of the ministry of John the Baptist, the baptism and temptation of Jesus, all of them relate the story of the ministry in Galilee, then tell of the journey to Jerusalem, and finally chronicle the last week in Jerusalem and the events which led to the arrest and death of Jesus. Each has peculiarities, both in matter and in method of presentation, but this basic structure is common to all.

The Fourth Gospel, however, has proceeded upon quite a different plan. Jesus' ministry begins in Judea

and although he appears three times in Galilee, the center of his activity is Jerusalem, where he comes four times to take part in feasts.

The plan of the author reveals itself in the division of his material at the close of Chapter Twelve. The first section, Chapters One to Twelve, portrays Jesus in contact with typical individuals or groups—the disciples, the Jews, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the nobleman, certain Greeks—all of whom respond to him either with belief or disbelief. The second section, from Chapter Thirteen to the end, shows Jesus in intimate fellowship with the inner group of disciples, with whom he is sharing the underlying purposes and motives, the deep relationships of his life with God and man.

Within this structural plan which bears little relationship to the chronology and geography of the Synoptic story, there are differences also in the treatment of the ministry itself. The problem of the duration of the ministry of Jesus as this Gospel treats it is a familiar one to students of the Gospels. As Mark relates the story of the public ministry, it is possible to think of its duration as within the compass of one year, whereas it must include three Passovers[1]

[1] 2:13; 6:4; 12:1.

and possibly four in the narrative of John (if the unnamed feast in 5:1 is held to be a Passover).

Quite as striking as this difference in duration are certain differences in the placing of events within the ministry. The position of the cleansing of the Temple has long been a subject of discussion among critics. Did it occur at the beginning of Jesus' public work, as the Fourth Gospel says, or did it, as the Synoptic writers say, come as the climax of his work and serve to bring to its culmination the opposition to him which precipitated his death? Some have tried to harmonize the narratives by the suggestion that there were two cleansings, one at the beginning and one at the close of the ministry, but the likelihood of repetition of so dramatic an act is not great, and it seems better to recognize the discrepancy and hold with one representation or the other. So also in the dating of the Last Supper and the death of Jesus. Did the Last Supper constitute the celebration of the Passover, as the Synoptists indicate, or did it take place before the Passover, as is so clearly indicated by John 13:1?

There are, moreover, events peculiar to this narrative which are of significance as we consider the peculiarities of the Gospel. True, each one of the

four biographies has some unique material, and it does not surprise us that this one has some narratives which no one of the other three possesses. What does arrest our attention, however, is the character of the peculiar material in John. It is strange that such significant interviews as those with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, with their revealing utterances about the mission of Jesus, should fail to appear in any other Gospel. But it is stranger still that such a picturesque miracle as the changing of the water into wine at Cana, and the utterly stupendous one of the raising of Lazarus from the dead should have escaped the attention of the Synoptic writers. These are conversations and events of first importance in the picture of the work and relationships of Jesus, which the Fourth Gospel gives, and its distinctive character is evidenced by its unique presentation of them.

But the singularity of the Fourth Gospel lies not only in such external matters as its plan and structure, its chronology, its presentation of striking, unique material. It differs also from the Synoptics in its inner aspects, in its portrait of Jesus, and its presentation of his work. The first appearance of Jesus on the pages of this Gospel is a hailing of him by

John the Baptist as "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." The Synoptic Jesus appeared as an itinerant teacher quietly working with fishermen and artisans, and gaining fame gradually as the news of his teaching and healing was reported from mouth to mouth. Peter's declaration at Cæsarea Philippi, "Thou are the Christ," had dramatic significance, because it was a recognition born out of experience. It was a confession of his own realization, won out of daily fellowship with him, that Jesus fulfilled those highest hopes of the past which had clustered about the Messianic concept. All the meaning is lost from an event which has the significance of climax in the Synoptic Gospels, if Jesus is pointed out at the initiation of his ministry as "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

In contrast with the Synoptic narrative, also, this Gospel presents Jesus as an omniscient, and wholly self-determining figure. He knew the past of the Samaritan woman before she told him. He knew Nathaniel while he was yet under the fig tree. He knew what he was going to do at the feeding of the five thousand and only asked of Philip the question about procedure in order to prove him. He had full knowledge of the thought of men whether they re-

vealed it by words or not: "But Jesus did not trust himself unto them, for that he knew all men, and because he needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man, for he himself knew what was in man." [3] He knew in advance that it was Judas who would betray him. He was fully in command of his own life. He says of his life: "No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." [5]

Contrast with this extraordinary consciousness of autonomy the Synoptic picture of Jesus in Gethsemane, torn with inward struggle, praying "that if it were possible, the hour might pass away from him." [4] In John only a faint echo of the Gethsemane striving appears, in Jesus' question in his conversation with the Greeks who sought him: "What shall I say? Father save me from this hour." And here the answer follows immediately in words that indicate his purposiveness and control over situations: "But for this cause came I unto this hour." [5] The Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is never the victim of circumstance, or of other men's designs. He is lord over his own destiny, and complete master even in his death.

[3] 2:25. [5] 10:18. [4] Mark 14:35. [5] 12:27.

There is also divergence from the Synoptic picture in the Fourth Gospel's presentation of Jesus' teaching. The Synoptics represents the parable as Jesus' favorite preaching form. Those inimitable stories of a boy who had run away from home, of a woman sweeping her floor, of people who did not respond to the wedding invitation, of girls who were heedless about filling their lamps, of a shepherd searching the mountain side for one sheep escaped from the flock, are his characteristic medium for bringing his teaching home. And alongside of the stories are the pungent, sententious sayings about the common things of life, about salt, a hilltop city, a lamp on a lampstand, lilies and sparrows, and about a harvest ready to be reaped. These are the characteristic vehicles for the teaching of the Synoptic Jesus.

But we look in vain for either parables or this type of pithy sayings in the Fourth Gospel. In place of the parable is the longer, more exalted philosophical discourse. In place of the short, maxim-like sayings are the assertions about himself and his meaning to the world. True, the figures of speech are from the simple, fundamental goods of life, bread, water, and light, but the sayings center about a philosophical concept, his own meaning for the

world, rather than about the practical conduct of life for his followers. "I am the bread of life," "I am the light of the world," "I am the good shepherd," express the meaning of his personality for those who believe on him. The allegory of the vine and the branches in Chapter Fifteen and the simile of the good shepherd in Chapter Ten have resemblances to the parable form, but both lack the simplicity and "single-pointedness" of the typical Synoptic form.

If the medium for Jesus' teaching in the Fourth Gospel is different from what we find in the Synoptics, the content shows even greater divergence. The Kingdom of God and the duties of membership in it have the central place in the teaching of the Synoptic Jesus. In the Fourth Gospel, the Kingdom is mentioned in only two connections, in the conversation with Nicodemus where it is but an equivalent for *salvation* (Except one be born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God),[6] and in answer to Pilate's question at his trial where Jesus says, "My kingdom is not of this world."[7] In neither case does the word connote what it does in the Synoptic teaching, an ideal for society in which the will of God has sway. This Gospel is not primarily concerned with this

[6] 3:3. [7] 18:36.

social ideal. What it wants first of all is that individuals shall experience God through Jesus and to that end that they shall appreciate the significance of his personality and work. This is the reason for the philosophical discourses with their great key affirmations: "I am the bread of life," "the light of the world," "the resurrection and the life," "the Way, the Truth and the Life." In other words the content of the message is a religion that is primarily personal and mystical as compared with a religion that is primarily social and ethical in the Synoptic Gospels. We shall have more to say later about the nature of the religious experience that the Fourth Gospel advocates, and of its correlation of ethical ideals with personal experience, but this recognition of the different content of the teaching is an important item in our comparison of John with the other Gospels.

As a result of this difference in fundamental view about the nature of the religious experience, the demands of discipleship, as presented by the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel, are different from those of the Synoptic Jesus. What Jesus asks of his followers in the Synoptic story is a doing of the law of the Kingdom, loving God and one's neighbor, going the second mile, turning the other cheek, forgiving one's

brother before going up to worship, selling all that one has to feed the poor, giving the cup of cold water, and like the good Samaritan, taking care of those who have fallen among robbers.

What Jesus asks of his followers in the Fourth Gospel is not this, but belief in himself, belief that he was what he claimed to be, and that through him they may experience God: "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do them, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father." [8]

The persistent emphasis on belief as the story unfolds shows how cardinal a point it is in the thought of the writer. As Jesus comes in contact with the disciples, with the people of Cana, the Samaritans, Nicodemus, the nobleman, the blind man and others, it is reported that as a result of his meeting with them, they believe, whereas on the other hand, there is ranged in high dramatic contrast, the rigid unbelief of "the Jews."

As we consider these differences in the method and content of Jesus' teaching between this Gospel and the Synoptics, another contrast asserts itself. One of

[8] 10:38.

the characteristic aspects of the teaching of Jesus, as the Synoptics present it, is its casual and occasional nature. Jesus teaches as he walks through a corn field, as he is seated on a mountain side with his disciples, as he strolls along the side of the lake with his friends. Sometimes the spontaneous outreach of his compassionate nature results in his curing a diseased mind or body; sometimes he needs to withdraw to a quiet place for rest as any leader must when the drain of life is heavy. What strikes the reader is the naturalness of the contacts, the unstudied simplicity of the mode of work.

In the Fourth Gospel, on the other hand, one remarks at once the conscious artistry with which events and teaching have been brought into relationship with each other. Miracles are no longer merely a reaching out in sympathy to those who need his help. They have become symbols of the basic assertions that Jesus makes about himself. So also the contacts with persons are not the accidental, casual affairs that they often seem to be in the Synoptic story. They serve only as setting for some truth about himself. The giving of the water to the woman at the well is appropriate background for his affirmation of himself as the water of life; the healing of the blind

man, for his assertion that he is the light of the world; the feeding of the five thousand, for his declaration that he is bread of life; and the raising of Lazarus for the saying, "I am the resurrection and the life." In this conscious plan of interweaving of incident and teaching, persons and events have both become subordinate to philosophical aims. They have significance as symbols of the truths that the writer wishes to commend.

In this connection, it is also to be noted that the Fourth Gospel gives a different view from the Synoptics of the place of miracle in the thought of Jesus. In the Synoptic story, Jesus avoids the use of miracle as a means to faith. "And he charged them that they should tell no man," [*] is a characteristic utterance regarding them. Faith is the prerequisite rather than the result of cure, and Jesus deprecates any tendency to reverse that relationship. But in the Fourth Gospel, the case is quite different. The characteristic word used to designate the miracles is "sign," and they are so held—*signs* that Jesus was what he claimed to be, the lord of life, and unique Son of the Father. They are attestations of his mission, and Jesus asks that those who come to him believe in him

[*] Mark 7:36.

because of them: "Though ye believe not me, believe the works: that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I in the Father." [10]

The most notable example of this attitude toward miracle on the part of Jesus is in the story of the raising of Lazarus, where Jesus talking with his disciples on the way says: "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe." [11] The greater the miracle, the greater will be the belief compelled by it. Such a saying has behind it a radically different conception of the function of miracle in the work of Jesus from that implied in the Synoptic story. The Jesus pictured here can hardly be imagined as sending the blind men away saying, "See that no man know it." [12]

In surveying these fundamental differences between the Synoptic Gospels and John, we must not lose sight of the fact that there are important likenesses too. We must not forget that the Synoptics and John have many narratives in common, the story of John the Baptist and Jesus, the cleansing of the Temple, the cure of the centurion's (or nobleman's) son, the feeding of the five thousand, the walking on the water, the anointing of his feet, the triumphal entry,

[10] 10:38. [11] 11:14-15. [12] Matt. 9:30.

and the story of the betrayal, arrest, and passion of Jesus. A common body of tradition lies behind the four Gospels, and our recognition of the differences in the Fourth from the other three must not obscure this fact.

Viewing likenesses and differences together, however, there remains for the student of the Gospel a question as to how these differences should be treated. Some have thought that wherever the two records differ, some scheme of harmonization should be sought, so that they can be brought together, as for example in the matter of the discrepancy in the cleansing of the Temple, two cleansings should be provided for, one at the beginning of the ministry, and one at the close. Others have maintained that divergences should be treated as means of correction of the historical record. Now it is the Synoptics which should correct the Fourth Gospel, as in the case of the method of Jesus' teaching, through parable and maxim; now it is the Fourth Gospel which should correct the Synoptic record, as in the case of the dating of the Last Supper and death of Jesus. But whichever record has been used to correct the other, the effort has been to use both records for a common end, the building up of more complete knowledge of

the actual content of the life and teachings of Jesus.

There is, however, another way in which the two portraits may be used, neither as competing one with the other, nor as corrective, one of the other, a way which takes into consideration not merely the nature of the differences between the two, but also the explicit purpose of the Fourth Gospel as distinct from the implicit (except in the case of Luke) purposes of the Synoptic writings. When the author of the Fourth Gospel says: "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name," [18] he has described his aim as theological rather than historical. He has indicated that he has used a consciously selective process with the hope that the reader may see in those stories, which he has chosen from the many that might have been told, reason to accept Jesus as his savior and so to enter into eternal life. What this author desired most was not factual accuracy or fullness, but the power to interpret to his readers the meaning of Jesus. That he saw the need

[18] 20:30-31.

for grounding such an interpretation in historical fact, of uniting Christian philosophy with the world of outward event was one of the finest insights of his genius. As we look at the world from which the Gospel came, the sagacity of this insight will become more apparent, and as we think of the use of the Gospel in our own day, it is a point which demands special appreciation. But for the question immediately before us, that of the relation of the Fourth Gospel to the Synoptics, it is one which becomes subordinate to the recognition that there is a difference in purpose in these writings, which is determining in their nature and function, and which should be determining in the use to which they are put. As the architect's blue print of a building serves a different need from that of the artist's sketch; as the photograph of a person gives a view of the personality that is different in kind from that of the portrait, so the Synoptic Gospels direct themselves to writing "in order, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first," [14] whereas this one, not disregarding but actually using the data of historical fact, using it with a free hand to be sure, has still turned to another task, that of appreciа-

[14] Luke 1:3.

tion and interpretation of the quality of life that came into the world with Jesus. Before we consider in detail the nature of his interpretation and ask the question of the significance of such an interpretive work, we shall do well to examine more closely the literary characteristics of the story that he told.

CHAPTER III

THE LITERARY ART OF THE GOSPEL

OUR major interest in this study is the interpretation of religion which the Fourth Gospel offers, and the serviceableness of that interpretation in our world to-day, and we shall be turning directly to the examination of the Gospel with that question in mind. But because one cannot interpret with sympathy unless he enters into the mood of the writer and understands, in some measure at least, the literary medium through which he speaks, we shall do well to approach our interpretive study through a consideration of the literary art of the Gospel.

Perhaps this need for consideration of the literary medium is greater with us than is usually the case, because the Fourth Gospel has been so long associated with three other writings, and its literary temper has tended to be assimilated to theirs. Actually, however, the literary mood of the Fourth Gospel is appreciably different from that of the Synop-

tics. This is not to say that the Synoptic Gospels are without interpretive aim. They, too, wish to interpret Jesus to their readers, and each is built upon certain presuppositions about him; each is eager to bring about certain recognitions about him in the minds of the readers; but they approach their task more simply and more naïvely than does the Fourth Gospel and with a somewhat different purpose controlling.

We have already indicated in the previous chapter how this difference in purpose emerges in actually different content, and we have set Luke's own statement of what he purposes over against the statement in John 20:31. But now we want to turn to the question of the way this purpose in the mind of the Fourth Gospel's author is carried out in the literary medium which he chooses.

The most fundamental question which arises in this connection is that regarding the author's use of history. The mood in which, as a creative artist, he approached his material is something which must be perceived by the interpreter of the Gospel if the interpretation is to be sound. And if it is true, as we have suggested, that the experience of religion is what he most wants to relate, then the stories that

he tells will be likely to have something of his own religious experience in them, as well as the sheer record of event. His own personality as well as the personality of Jesus will be revealed more fully through the writing than if he were studying to give merely objective facts. "Every scene he depicts," says Streeter of this author, "every discourse he relates—whencesoever originally derived—is the distilled essence of something that has been pondered upon and lived out in actual life until it has become the very texture of his soul." [1] It is indeed a free use of history that makes him portray Jesus speaking about himself in figures which really represent the author's own experience of religion through Jesus, but history was subordinate in his thought to that deepest of all realities, the life with God through Jesus. When Jesus is represented as pointing to himself as the bread and the water of life, or as the resurrection and the life, it is the author's deepest convictions that are being reported and not the actual words of Jesus. When Jesus is brought upon the scene by John the Baptist, heralded as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, it is the author's belief about him that we are being given, rather than an

[1] Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, p. 383.

actual picture of the way in which Jesus undertook his task of preaching and teaching.

But of course this raises at once the question as to whether the artist has so far transcended the material which came to him regarding Jesus that he has deliberately set the facts one side and has constructed his own story. No one can deny that this is a hard question to answer, where fact and symbol are both important to the author. How can we always know the relation that they bear to each other? We can note the differences and the similarities between this Gospel and the Synoptics, can reflect upon how the peculiar result which we have in the Fourth Gospel can have come about, but no one at this date can be sure that he has entered fully and accurately into the processes of heart and mind which emerged in the literary product that the Gospel is. As Canon Streeter has said, "Only those who have merely trifled with the problems it suggests are likely to speak dogmatically on the subject." [3] But if one is to attempt interpretation of the Gospel, the problem must be thought through and some theory or hypothesis adopted which shall guide in the handling of the material.

[3] Streeter, *Foundations*, p. 82.

For myself (and one can only venture an opinion, when the road to complete knowledge is no longer open) it grows increasingly hard to believe, as I go on working with the Gospel, that the author was consciously manipulating the material to suit his own ends. The story is so simply told, sincerity speaks so plainly in every line of the writing, that I can draw but one conclusion from it; namely, that the author believed his story to be actual fact. He handles his material as one who cares for fact. He cares for the homely details of waterpots filled to the brim, of the plentiful water supply at Ænon, of the weariness of Jesus on his journey through Samaria, and of the thirst of Jesus on the cross—little details which would not matter to one who was thinking of his story as merely a vehicle for abstract truth.

There can be no question, on the other hand, that the author saw in his material a significance beyond that of mere fact. The facts are symbols of those deeper truths about Jesus which to him are the heart of religion. The events which he chooses to relate are those events which have the greatest meaning, those which will be most cogent in their effect upon the judgment of the reader. But this is a different thing from saying that the story is merely allegory,

and that the factual side of things was subordinated completely to the interests of religious belief.

What the process was by which this writing came to be, one can only conjecture, but it seems possible that a long and reverent pondering upon the stories of Jesus which had come to him (whether in oral or written form) had made these stories so much a part of himself that the religion he himself had experienced through them came to be identified with them. He had actually found Jesus to be the bread and water of life, and because this was the deepest reality in life to him, he came to think of Jesus as pointing to himself and saying, "I am the bread of life," and "I am the water of life," on occasions which by their nature made appropriate settings for such words. His own meditation upon the stories about Jesus, and his own passionate commitment to the life of religion through him have thus become, unconsciously for him, part of the narrative he writes.[8]

Whatever help we may gain in this fashion for our interpretation of the discourse material, there still remains the problem of the miracle narratives that are unique to this Gospel. Of the seven miracles

[8] See the section on "Creative Memory" in Streeter *The Four Gospels*, p. 383ff.

related in the Gospel, five have either parallels in the Synoptic Gospels, as in the case of the feeding of the five thousand and the walking on the water, or related narratives in the Synoptics, as in the case of the three healing stories.[4] But the two stories of greatest wonder, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, and the changing of the water into wine at Cana are unique to John; they stand forth like great bowlders from the side of a mountain, arresting attention and defying attempts to assimilate them to harmony in the surrounding landscape.

Whence did these stories come? Are they the product of the imagination of our writer? Were they fashioned by him deliberately to coerce belief in Jesus? The general handling of miracles as signs that Jesus was the unique Son of the Father, as well as the surprising statement of Jesus in the Lazarus story that he is glad of Lazarus' death "to the end that ye may believe" tend perhaps to bring about this opinion. But again as I contemplate the stories as a whole, I find this view untenable, the view, namely, that the author deliberately cut himself loose from what he believed to be the facts and fabricated

[4] The healing of the nobleman's son, John 4:46f. Cf. Matt. 8 and Luke 7; the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda, John 5:2ff. Cf. Mark 2; the blind man, John 9:1ff. Cf. Luke 18.

stories about Jesus which were to be merely allegories, setting forth his religious significance. The Jesus of these two stories is no ethereal figure, no mere abstraction; he is in the one, a son whose mother does not quite understand his purposes or his work; in the other, he is a friend who mourns with the Bethany household over the loss of a brother. The details of homely life, the vivid realism of both stories, the pathos in the portrayal of the sisters' grief in the Lazarus story, seem to me to indicate that the writer believed he was dealing with actual fact. Again, as we have noted above, he saw a wider significance in the material than that of *mere* fact. The miracles were signs that Jesus was what he claimed to be, and these greater miracles were to be thought of as greater signs. But this is not to deny that the author believed his material to be true to the facts.

The processes by which the two stories came into being are not easy to trace at this date. Did the story of changing water into wine grow, as legends often do, about some vivid saying of the great teacher? Was it some amplification of and accretion to the saying about new wine in old bottles? Did the story of an actual bringing to life of the known Lazarus grow by easy stages from a sentence dealing with the

subject of a coming to life from the dead, spoken as a closing word in the story about a fictitious Lazarus? "And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one (*i.e.,* Lazarus) rise from the dead." [6] Such legendary accumulation in the life story of a religious leader is natural in an age which thought of the normal province of religion as the field of wonder, and held such theories of health and disease as did the first century of the Christian era. But in whatever fashion the stories arose, in whatever form they came to the hand of our author, I believe that he received them in good faith and used them only because he believed them to be fact. He offered them to his readers on the basis of that faith, but also on the basis of a wider faith that these stories, and the others that he selected for his narrative were so compelling of belief in Jesus, that through them his readers must believe.

This is, as I view it, the primary point in any analysis of the Gospel's literary mood. It presents its material with simplicity and sincerity of heart. It presents Jesus as having lived a genuine human life (there were those in his time who were denying it—

[6] Luke 16:31.

Docetists, they were called). It presents the incidents that make up that life with an underlying belief in their authentic character. The wider meaning of the life in religious experience is always there; but the deep conviction that the life was real and that the events that made it up had meaning in and of themselves is basic in the writer's thought, and should, I believe, be always recognized as fundamental to any true interpretation of the Gospel.

And is not this singleness of mind, this sincerity of heart, one of the greatest charms of the writing? No fanciful or allegorical treatment of religious experience could be so effective. No treatment of the life of Jesus as completely subordinated to the abstractions of religious thought could have had such appeal. There is weight in this simple, straightforward narration of events which are cherished in the mind of the writer as actual happenings in history. There is charm in the telling which comes from the sincere conviction of the one who tells.

Absence of the fanciful in conception is, moreover, balanced by an absence of the ornate in style. Simple sentence structure, the preference for the coördinating conjunction over the subordinating, the choice of no extraordinary vocabulary—all build a style that is

consonant with simplicity of conception. No intricate metaphors, no philosophical terms (save one, the Logos), no involved devices of style are employed. Figures from the everyday goods of life—bread, water, wine, sheep and their shepherd, a vine and its branches, furnish the imagery of the writing, and through them its philosophy is bodied forth. The style is limpid. It flows smoothly, monotonously even, with a gentle rhythm, more marked perhaps in the original than in translation, but distinguishable in the English.

But while the Gospel is rightly to be characterized as simple and straightforward in its literary approach, there is also another aspect of the writing which must be recognized. Paradoxically enough, we must also acknowledge that it is a product of conscious artistry. It reads, as one writer says, "like a child's primer," [*] but it has the exactly opposite quality of studied grace. Here is a point of real literary difference from the Synoptics, for their art is largely unconscious and springs not from design but from freshness of interest in, and depth of feeling about, the material that they present. It is true that we are coming to recognize a gradation here among the

[*] Ballantine, *Discovering Jesus*, p. 73.

Synoptic writers. Mark is less the conscious writer of literature than Matthew, and Matthew than Luke.[7] But between Luke and John there is a wide difference in this respect. So far as the manipulation of material to artistic ends is concerned, Luke is, as Cadbury says, "satisfied with rather superficial results." [8] But the author of the Fourth Gospel is clearly shaping the material with freedom to further certain artistic designs of his own. He introduces the narrative with a poetic prologue. The structure of the Gospel divides the material into two groups—one showing Jesus in contact with certain typical individuals and groups, and one showing him in intimate private fellowship with his disciples. There is a studied relationship between events and teachings, so that the events serve to symbolize the content of the teaching. He uses special numbers, such as the seven miracles, and seven oracular utterances by Jesus beginning with "I am." He exhibits freedom from what we must think was current tradition in the placing of events. All these phases of his writing testify to a conscious manipulation of the material to bring out certain artistic ends which the author cherishes in his

[7] *See* Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, Ch. 12.
[8] Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, p. 344.

conception of the book. These are not the marks of a naïve, unconscious artistry. They are the marks of planful design.

Is not the literary appeal of the Gospel partly accounted for in this, which appears as a self-contradictory situation within it, this blending of simplicity and artlessness, with conscious literary artistry? It is a simple story, told with almost childlike candor; it entertains no such fanciful speculations, no such difficult abstractions, as do some of the later mystical writings of the Christian tradition. It deals simply and directly with what its author believes to be the sober realities of fact and history. It handles its stories with a realism that makes the scenes pass before us with great vividness. We see unforgetable pictures of persons: Nathaniel standing irresolute under the fig tree; Judas clutching his moneybag and then going out into the night; the sisters of Lazarus, figures of exquisite pathos, as they mourn the loss of their brother; the parents of the blind youth, turning to the boy to speak, since now he is of age; Peter warming himself at the fire as he denies his master; Jesus, taking the towel and basin to wash the disciples' feet; and the "other disciple" in breathless eagerness outrunning Peter on the way to the empty

tomb. These are delineations of extraordinary vividness.

In addition to the vividness that comes through realistic portraiture, there is a vitality in the narrative that springs from the fact that its profoundest religious views are presented to us through the medium of conversation. Nicodemus asks the most natural question for anyone to ask when he queries: "How can a man be born when he is old?" and by it he elicits one of the profoundest messages of the Gospel. The woman at the well is quite human in her request, "Sir, give me this water that I thirst not," and her request is answered by sayings which carry deep meaning. In the intimate meeting of Jesus with his disciples, recorded in the latter part of the Gospel, they ask their questions, one after another, Peter, Thomas, Philip, and Judas: "Lord, whither goest thou?" "We know not whither thou goest. How know we the way?" "Show us the Father and it sufficeth us," "Lord, what is come to pass that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us and not unto the world?" [9] The questions are natural and simple, and in answer to them come the deepest and most significant teachings of the Gospel. The use of this me-

[9] Chs. 13 and 14.

dium for conveying the Gospel's teaching is one evidence of the skill of its author.

Persons and teachings are brought together in a vividly realistic fashion but naturalness and lifelikeness are also conveyed through little pictorial touches in the portrayal of the scenes: the scourge of cords with which Jesus drove the traders out of the Temple, the waterpot left at the well at Sychar, as the woman hastened to the city to tell her friends about her visitor, the lanterns and torches that light the faces of those who came to arrest Jesus, the fire of coals about which servants and officers were gathered in the cold of the high priest's court, the fragrance from the ointment that filled the house at Bethany. Little word-pictures give an air of fidelity to life and at the same time show the author's skill as an artist.

Natural and lifelike as the narrative is, there is always that other quality pervading it of a meaning beyond the mere facts, a meaning which is summed up in the belief that Jesus was the unique Son of the Father, and the bringer of life to men. In the last analysis the Gospel is not the naïve chronicle of event. The author is more than recorder; he is poet, artist, and believer as well.

I know of no parallel in literature to this peculiar

blend of artless, realistic story with the conscious adaptation of history to the greater ends of truth and religious experience. The dialogues of Plato offer no real analogy. Notwithstanding the ease and naturalness of the conversational method in the dialogues, the persons are at best merely the vehicles for the presentation of ideas. They allow Plato to introduce the play of mind on mind, the give and take of argument and word-play; they enable him to sift opinions and show the final superiority of the views of the great master-teacher Socrates; but when they have done this, their function has been fulfilled. The ideas completely outweigh the persons in importance. Neither does the figure of Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita offer us a parallel. So little of definitely recognizable personality does the figure offer that it has been assimilated to many other differing conceptions in the later writings.[18] The Hermetic Writings from Egypt have often been compared with the Fourth Gospel, but Hermes (or Tat, with whom he is often identified), who is the spokesman for this religious philosophy, is merely a voice. Hermes, the Thrice-Great, offers instruction that lights the pathway to true knowledge, but he is after all only a conventional

[18] Cf. Kenneth Saunders, *The Gospel for Asia*, p. 181.

mouthpiece for the views presented, a literary rather than human figure.

The Fourth Gospel offers us a unique fusion of history with philosophy, of realistic character portrayal with the presentation of religious experience. Here is both truth and poetry, both simplicity of narration and the conscious manipulation of means to artistic ends. Here is realism side by side with symbolism, humanity bodying forth abstraction. Here is a fusion of the life story of Jesus with the religious experience of the author of the writing, which defies at this date a sure and complete analysis into the component parts which made it up. The secret of any true understanding of the Gospel lies here, in the recognition that, as a literary work, it is a unique blend of history with religious experience, an unusual fusion of fact with poetry.

We need hardly enlarge upon what this means for us in our interpretation of the Gospel. There can be no entering into this writing without realizing that it is a law unto itself. It will not classify as history, as biography, as fiction, as drama. In the Christian literary tradition it stands at the turning point between the chronicle and the apology. It is neither, but it partakes of the nature of both. In the literature

of religion the world over, it stands unique as a blend of realism with mystical religion. We cannot use it sympathetically and intelligently unless we appreciate the literary uniqueness that it offers. It was great insight in the author that made him realize the importance of grounding his interpretation of religious experience in history. It was real psychological intuition that made him know how mystical religion would be strengthened if it were focussed in a personality who embodied the life of oneness with God. Our own concern for history sometimes obscures for us the fact that for the author of the Gospel, history was always second to the major and controlling interest which compelled him to write, the fuller life with God through Jesus.

In the closing paragraph of the essay on "Style," Pater says that great art must have "something of the soul of humanity in it" and must find "its logical, its architectural place, in the great structure of human life." As I look back over what we have been saying about the Fourth Gospel, it seems to me that this is just what we have been implying regarding it. It has "the soul of humanity" in the realism with which the tender figure of Jesus moves through its pages. It has its "architectural place in the great

structure of human life" in its interpretation of religion, by which men enter into the more abundant life. Here is the secret of its art. Through an historical personality, there has been made real and appealing the infinite reach of religious experience.

CHAPTER IV

HOW THE FOURTH GOSPEL CAME TO BE

THE Fourth Gospel was written to meet certain real needs in the Christian community in its own time. If we are to understand the book fully and appreciate it, we should seek to enter into the life that surrounded it, and to discern, as far as we may, the motives which brought it into being. Tradition tells that the book arose in Ephesus, and to my mind the internal evidence from the writing itself supports that tradition. From the very nature of the Gospel, we can see that it was written by some one who was in contact with Greek thought, and who wanted to present the Christian message in such a form that it would be understandable and appealing to people of the Western world. Let us look back for a bit to see what was the background of such a writing, not only in its immediate surroundings in Ephesus, but in the wider background of preceding Christian history.

The religion of Jesus was not a "new" religion

except as the release of creative energy through a prophetic personality always makes for newness of life. Jesus was a Jew; his followers were Jews; and the way of life which Jesus taught and lived was not a break with Hebrew religion but a spiritualizing and quickening of that which was best within it. Jesus said of himself that he came not to destroy but to fulfill the Law.

To those who followed Jesus, the identification of him with the Messiah was an acceptance of him as the fulfillment of the highest hopes of Judaism. The finest ideals of the Hebrew past seemed to meet their realization in him. But his tragic death tended to frustrate those anticipations about him which his followers cherished, and although he himself had felt and had exhibited greatest kinship with the prophetic stream of Hebrew religion, those who mourned his death turned for comfort to the apocalyptic strain of thought which allowed them to think of him as returning on clouds of heaven to claim the glory which his earthly life had denied him.

Thus the personality of Jesus did in fact become the focus for a new movement which set itself apart from Judaism, not only in the quickened ethical em-

phasis in religion, for which Jesus had asked, but also in its concentration on his personality for which he had not asked. In this fashion, quite unconsciously at first, but more and more consciously as time went on, the Christian movement did differentiate itself from Judaism, and Christianity as a self-conscious and independent religion came into being. Since the life-giving element in the new experience was not that which had been central in historic Judaism, but the personality of Jesus, it was natural that the movement should cut across the national and racial boundary, as it grew in strength. And so it did, although some spoke the word "to none save Jews only," there were others who "spake to Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus."

This process of Hellenizing, or universalizing the movement was greatly accelerated by the work of Paul, a mystic with a great genius for organization, who had found after considerable struggle and resistance that his best self was realized in mystical union with God through Jesus, whom henceforward he knew as Lord. Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome were the centers of his activity and his remarkable power of organization through visits, letters, and delegation of leadership, brought into being little

groups of Christians in the major centers of the Hellenistic world.

The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was a deathblow to any thought of Palestine as the headquarters of the Christian movement, and the story of Christianity in the later decades of the first century is a record of adaptation to and assimilation of the thought, the politics, the economic and social life of the Western world. That it became at the beginning of the fourth century the recognized religion of the Roman state was due partly to the consecrated enthusiasm of those who made up the movement, and partly to its flexibility and adaptability in the complex Roman world. Though it kept as its core the ethical monotheism of Judaism, and always centered about a personality who lived his life as a Jew and gave his message, if not as the scribes and Pharisees, still as one having the authority of prophethood, in the end it became a religion of the Gentile world, influenced by and influencing the philosophy, the religions, the state craft of the Roman Empire.

The rise of a literature in the movement was spontaneous and unselfconscious at first. Paul's letters were never thought of by him as documents of enduring worth. They were occasional in nature, the

eager outreach of his friendliness and sense of responsibility for the people to whom he had preached and among whom he had worked. The letters were not long, however, in coming to be so regarded, as we discover in the reference to them in II Peter as "scripture." [1] As response to human need, they had come into being, and because they served human need in a wider sense than their writer had anticipated, they continued to be read and circulated.

The records of Jesus' life and teaching had also a simple, almost casual beginning. The stories he had told, the unforgettable sayings he had used were at first passed on orally from one to another. Nothing more was needed among people who expected Jesus to return soon and bring with him the peace and plenty of a Messianic reign. But as time went on and memories were in danger of becoming less vivid, little collections of sayings, little compendia of the stories told about him were written. Tradition tells us that the first gospel was written because Mark, who had served as Peter's interpreter as he worked in Rome, realized at Peter's death that these memories should now be committed to a more permanent form. There seems no reason to doubt the tradition,

[1] II Peter, 3:16.

and Mark's swift, eager narrative fulfills successfully such a purpose. That Mark's Gospel was not wholly adequate was not surprising, however. It reviewed events so swiftly and interpreted Jesus so little. Other purposes than his needed to be served, and another Gospel came in time, portraying Jesus in relation to historic Jewish religion, and adding to Mark's chronicle of events a record of Jesus' teaching. Still later came another that intended not only to supplement Mark where he was weakest, on the teaching side, but to put the story "more accurately and in order." Doubtless the needs of their several localities were in the minds of the authors as they wrote. It is probable that the home of the Gospel of Matthew was Antioch, and Asia Minor the home of Luke. Then as the importance of keeping a record became more apparent, there came the first chronicle of the movement, Luke's second volume, Acts, which told the story of the spread of the Gospel as far as Paul carried it.

New situations and varied problems called out other writings, many of which were probably lost, but some of which have come down through the ages telling us to-day of the concerns that lay upon the hearts of those who were leaders in one way or

another in the Christian community, in the later decades of the first century. The little homily of James with its preference for the ethical expression of religion as over against the mystical, the letter of I Peter urging steadfastness in persecution, and the more formal, dignified treatise of Hebrews pronouncing Christianity the final and ultimate revelation of God and urging a perfected worship as the essence of true religion—all of these testify to the varied interests and problems that arose in the adaptation of the new movement to the many-sided life of the Roman Empire. But perhaps most revealing of all, is that unique document which arose in Asia Minor in the early nineties under the stress of Domitian's persecution, the book of Revelation. This first Christian apocalypse, with its fervid imaginative power, with its impassioned protest against Rome's treatment of the Christians, belongs clearly to the literature of oppression, and is an extraordinary means of insight into the faith and hope with which the early Christians met the situation of persecution.

Through all these writings we gather pictures of the struggling but expanding Christian community sometimes meeting questions about its relationship to the Jewish faith and practice, sometimes encoun-

tering hostility from the Jews, sometimes handling divisive forces within its own membership, now adjusting itself to unfavorable political and social conditions, now needing to define its own thought in relation to those who were called "false teachers," sometimes having to direct its own members to higher moral standards, sometimes reviving a languishing hope in the second coming of Jesus, sometimes bringing its own theology to clearer expression because it must compete with other philosophies and other religions of the Hellenistic world. Now it was the need for chronicling the past that was the spur to literary expression. Now it was the challenge to meet the pressing problems of the immediate present that brought these letters, homilies, and gospels into being.

With this view of the swiftly developing life of Christianity in general, we may turn to Ephesus and the more immediate background of the Fourth Gospel. Our earliest picture of Christianity in Ephesus is in the story of Paul's work there in Acts 18 and 19, first in a short visit on his way back to Antioch from Corinth, and then in the long residence there that constituted the major part of his third missionary journey. What Paul found as a basis for his

work, we can at least partially imagine. Here was a great commercial city, both a market and a port, the capital of the province of Asia, a city beautifully planned and so substantially built that even to-day we can see the remains of its well-designed streets, its temples, theater, lecture halls and libraries. The ancient temple to Diana, already more than three hundred years old when Paul came, was one of the wonders of the ancient world. The crude image of the goddess, of which the tradition is cited in Acts that it fell down from Jupiter, was a very ancient figure typifying the fertility of nature. "Diana of the Ephesians" was not merely the Greek goddess whose other name was Artemis. She was also identified with the Eastern goddess Cybele, who was the great earth-mother, the symbol of the productive power of nature. In the religious syncretism which brought the two goddesses into one, Ephesus was responding to the influences of both East and West, for here was truly the meeting place of East and West. Founded as an Ionian city, Ephesus had the traditions of the Greek world behind her. But subject always to the play of the East upon her, through commerce, travel, and the Persian conquest, she had taken on much of the character of an Eastern city.

Ephesus was not merely an important port and market; she was a city with intellectual traditions as well. Heraclitus had established here in the sixth century B.C. an influential school of philosophy, which still had followers at the time Paul came. More vital, however, at this time were the more recent and more popular schools of philosophy, the Cynic, the Stoic, and the Epicurean. Less concerned than classical philosophy with the problems of metaphysics, the new sects or societies were primarily interested in philosophy as a guide to the good life. The practical problems of the moral life of man were their major interest, and they were far more popular and democratic in their methods of work than the ancient classical philosophers had ever been. These schools made philosophy a thing for the man in the street, and often used the street corner and the market place as the rostrum for their appeal to passers-by.

If philosophy was making a more popular appeal at this time, so also was religion. The worship of Diana of which we read in Acts was the most important of the cults in Ephesus, but it was not the only one. In the centuries just preceding the Christian era there had sprung up all over the eastern end

of the Mediterranean basin popular religious cults. The ancient Greek religion had been dying out on its own soil and it had little to offer the Eastern world when Alexander's conquests carried Greek culture and civilization into the East. On the other hand, Persian and Babylonian thought as it had come westward with the Persian conquest had left its mark on the popular religious life. As a result of the fusion of East and West, and in consequence of the unquenchable yearning of the human heart for the satisfactions of religion, there had come, in the absence of a strong religion representing the more advanced thought of the time, a series of local cults, sometimes quite crude in their practices of worship, usually simple in their thought, and occasionally corrupt on the moral side. The term "mystery-cult" has been applied to these popular religions because they usually centered about a secret ceremony of initiation and worship and emphasized the esoteric character of the knowledge which their initiation imparted. They had in common not only this emphasis upon a secret ritual, but the promise of a blessed immortality for the devotees, who by uniting themselves with the cult became one with a dying and reviving savior-god. Common to all, also, was some myth which was the

basis for this revival-notion; the myth in some way springing from a nature-process, and typifying the awakening of nature after the sleep of winter. The cult of Cybele and Attis in Asia Minor, of Isis and Osiris in Egypt, of Mithra in Persia, and of Dionysus at Athens were all examples of this type of popular religion, and probably adherents of all of these and more would be found in the Ephesus of Paul's day. For although many of the cults had been local in origin, they had traveled with the shifting life of the Roman world and now were scattered throughout the cities of the Mediterranean world. Some had arisen side by side in the same community like the Dionysus cult and the Orphic mysteries in Thrace. The mysteries of Eleusis are a good specimen of the migratory character of these religions. This cult, founded under local auspices at Eleusis and at first under the control of the municipality and admitting only citizens of the community to its membership, began later to attract the interest of Athenians who came out from the great city to view with curiosity such portions of the ceremony of the cult as would be open to spectators. Then Athens took the city of Eleusis and maintained the cult as a means of benefit to the city, and later people from all over the Mediterranean world came

to participate in it. Finally it separated itself from its local moorings and became one of the universal cults of the time. The fact that these religions were individual in their interests rather than national or tribal was of course a factor which made for their spread.[2]

The Ephesus of Paul's day had not only representatives of the philosophies and popular religions of the Hellenistic world, but a sufficient number of Jews to maintain a Jewish synagogue. It was in a Jewish synagogue that Paul began his work, and the intellectual and religious curiosity of at least some among the Jewish group is evidenced by their urging Paul to stay longer and discuss with them, when he made the short stop at Ephesus on his way back to Antioch from Corinth. That this tolerance and eagerness for the new was not characteristic of them all, however, we see in the fact that Paul is forced to go to one of the Greek centers of education, the school of Tyrannus, because some of the Jews were "hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the

[2] In addition to such religious societies as these which formed about the cults, new groupings were being formed which combined the interests of philosophy and religion. Neo-Pythagoreanism and Gnosticism were both of this type. Neo-Pythagoreanism combined a reassertion of the number-scheme of Pythagoras with an ideal for an ascetic community life, while Gnosticism emphasized a magical or revealed knowledge as central to salvation, which meant deliverance from the material world.

multitude." [8] It is true also that when Paul comes back to Miletus on a final journey to Jerusalem and is speaking there with the elders from Ephesus, he refers to the plots of the Jews as the cause of his "trials" there.

Some of this Jewish group had become acquainted with Christian teaching through Apollos, an eloquent Alexandrian, a man of strong intellectual and spiritual gifts, but whose instruction in the Christian way had been, according to our chronicler, in some way inadequate. That he "knew only the baptism of John" seems to indicate that he had been attracted by the ethical teaching of John, and had been interested in the Christian society, but had not fully understood what the central principle of Christianity was, the allegiance to Jesus as Lord. That there were others with a similar limitation upon their participation in the Christian way of life we know both because Luke tells of a group of twelve men whom Paul rebaptized, because they had previously received only the baptism of John, and because the Gospel of John takes such special pains to indicate the true relationship of John the Baptist to Jesus; namely, his subordinate status in Christian history.

[8] Acts 19:9.

The events of Paul's stay in Ephesus are a familiar story, and they are indicative of the life that the little Christian group would meet in this great city; the seven sons of the Jew, Sceva, who thought that the name of Jesus would outclass in magical power the many spells and charms offered in the name of religion in that credulous age; the burning of the magical books, a costly bonfire in the eyes of those who cherished illusions about their potency; the mob scene which has taken such hold on the imagination of our chronicler, in which the clash of interests between the new teaching and the strongest local cult is put before us in such a picturesque light; and finally that most tender and beautiful scene which shows Paul saying farewell to the group that had been closest to him in his work there. Whatever we think in general about the problem of the speeches in the book of Acts, this one of Paul's to the elders of Ephesus at Miletus [4] has the earmarks of a high degree of authenticity upon it,[5] and the picture of his work among them and of the tender relationship subsisting between them is undoubtedly a true view of the situation. He had taught boldly both in public

[4] Acts 20:18-35.

[5] *See* V. Bartlet, "The Speeches of Paul in Acts," *Cambridge Biblical Essays.*

and in house-to-house visits, working among both Jews and Greeks, and they had become so fond of him that they sorrowed "most of all for the word that he had spoken, that they should behold his face no more." [6]

This representation of Paul's friendly relations with the Ephesian group is further borne out by the little letter of recommendation (Romans 16) now appended to the Roman letter, but probably intended for Ephesus. Phœbe, who has been a worker in the church at Cenchrea, is going to Ephesus, and Paul writes to commend her to his friends there. Amid the many greetings to individuals comes the urge to unity: "Mark them that are causing the divisions . . . and turn away from them." That Paul speaks of the Christian gospel as the "revelation of a mystery" [7] is perhaps an accommodation of his language to that which was the current coin of the religious life in this Hellenistic world.[8]

Other glimpses of the life of the Christian community at Ephesus come to us in Paul's letter which now bears the title of Ephesians. Even though we cannot

[6] Acts 20:38. [7] Romans 16:25.

[8] For a discussion of the destination of the letter in Romans 16 see Moffatt, *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, p. 134ff.

think of this letter as directed exclusively to the group in Ephesus,[9] it does probably represent the interests of the vicinity, being a circular letter to several of the churches in Asia Minor. Here it is interesting to note that at the close of Paul's life the question of the unity of the churches has come to the fore, and that the thought of the Church as the fulfillment of the eternal purposes of God, as the body of which Christ is the head, is put forward as a unifying principle.

Of the life of the Christians in Ephesus between the time of Paul and the last decades of the first century we know all too little. By inference from the letter called I Peter and the letters which form the introduction to the book of Revelation we can discover in retrospect what some of the tendencies of life and problems of thought must have been. Both of these documents arose in Domitian's reign, I Peter in the early years of it, and Revelation after the year 90. I Peter was written from Rome to the whole

[9] Some critics hold that the letter now bearing the title Ephesians is not a genuine work of Paul. It is certainly true that its thought differs to a considerable extent from some of his earlier works, but its similarity to Colossians makes the problem more intricate than if it stood alone in this respect. To the present writer the problem seems to have no clear solution, but the balance of the evidence to be on the side of its genuineness.

group of Christians in the provinces that comprise Asia Minor. The interests of the little letter are practical; it urges that the Christians shall live "seemly" among the Gentiles; the problems of homes in which either husband or wife is alone in having accepted Christianity are discussed; sober and holy living is enjoined on all. But the question of most vital moment here is that of persecution. It is a new experience, being called to suffer for the name of Christ, and the writer urges his reader not to think it strange, but to consider it a proving, an opportunity to share in the sufferings of Christ. The command to "Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the King" [10] is a counsel to subjection to the powers that be, which gains urgency because it is accompanied by the affirmation that the end of all things is at hand.[11] They are to deal with life as "sojourners and pilgrims," conscious that the patient enduring of their present suffering will lead to a "crown of glory that fadeth not away" when Jesus "shall be manifested." [12]

By the time the book of Revelation was written, however, persecution has become a common and all-too-familiar experience. It is no longer a strange,

[10] I Peter 2:17. [11] 4:7. [12] I Peter 5:4.

fiery trial, but a recognized factor to be dealt with in daily experience. Failure to participate in the rites of Emperor-worship, "to fall down and worship the beast," as this writing puts it, may mean death. Already there has been one martyr, Antipas in Pergamum, and the major motive for the writing of the book was to urge constancy in the Christian faith even though it resulted in death. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" [18] sounds the keynote of the messages to the churches. I Peter's counsel to be in subjection to the ordinances of kings and governors has given place now to open hostility to the Roman state, whose policy under Domitian had brought about a revival of the cult of Emperor-worship, with special stress on the national rites, as a test of loyalty to the Empire. The symbols of warfare, the heightened supernaturalism, the fantastic imagery of apocalypticism, the solemn warnings of the book testify to a state of tension between the Christians and their surroundings which is greater than any the Church has experienced up to this date.

As we examine the message to the Church at Ephesus, in the group of letters which constitute the

[18] Rev. 2:10.

introduction to the book, we see the reflection of the old problem about who is constituted with the authority of apostleship. Some who were not apostles at all had given themselves out to be such, but the writer of the letters feels that the community in Ephesus has been wise in dealing with them. They are to be commended for this, but they need reproof on another score. They have "given up loving one another" as they did at first.[14] The first enthusiastic sense of oneness, of brotherhood in Christ, has begun to wane, and the need of adjustment to a world that did not come to an end as speedily as they had thought it would, has tended to loosen that tie which held them so close together in the expectation of the immediate return of Jesus.

There has been one problem in the group at Ephesus about which we have all too little information. There has been some difficulty both here and at Pergamum with one Nicolas and his followers. In the letter to Pergamum in Revelation his followers are classed with the Baalamites who are too liberal, too easy in their relation to the Gentile world. These Nicolaitans, whom the writer of the letters does not hesitate to say he hates, with their too free interpreta-

[14] Rev. 2:4, in Moffatt's translation.

tion of Christianity, show that the old problem of Paul's day, the definition of Christian faith and practice in relation to the Gentile world, is still alive, although in a somewhat different form.

In this city of Ephesus, perhaps fifteen years later, perhaps twenty or twenty-five years later than the writing of this book of Revelation, the Fourth Gospel was written. It had a real mission to perform in the situation that we have just pictured. Here in the Christian community was a time of transition—transition from the primitive era of spontaneous enthusiasm to a more settled and permanent *régime.* The immediate expectation of Jesus' return was gone.[15] The leadership of Paul was now a half-century in the background. Part of the adaptation of Christianity to the Western world had been done by him, but as years went on, new problems and new needs had arisen. The liberalizing of the Christian movement to allow for the participation of Gentiles in the brotherhood had made necessary a further step in liberalizing and adaptation. If Christianity was to be intelligible in this new world it must talk in terms that were understandable to it. It must interpret itself in the light of the philosophical

[15] II Peter 3:4.

thought of such a city as Ephesus; it must compete on the religious side with the redemption religions and offer a superior type of salvation if it were to succeed in a world like this. It must touch the problem of the hostility of Jews to the Christian society, and deal with the too conservative element within its own ranks. It must transform the more practical and external concepts which it had inherited from Judaism into concepts that could live in a world that was talking about religion as "secret knowledge," and of its power to "save" and of its guarantee of life after death. It must free itself from the already outworn concepts of apocalypticism and offer an eschatology that could commend itself in a more sophisticated world.

It was a large task that needed to be done, and it was a great genius who undertook it. The author of our Gospel must have gone to his writing with a great sense of mission. Here, on the one hand, was this beautiful city, teeming with life, but lacking much; here on the other, was the little Christian group growing rapidly but struggling with problems so great that its life seemed threatened at every turn; and between the two was his own deep inward experience of religion in Jesus, an experience so vital

and so satisfying that in it he felt that Jew, Gentile, and Christian alike could find life. In this experience of Jesus he was confident that those who wanted the true philosophy would find Light; those who wanted salvation would find the Way; and all whose longings were not as clearly defined but who were longing for some better thing in this worldly, cynical city would find Life. It was the challenge of such an environment that brought into being the Gospel of John.

CHAPTER V

THE TASK OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL. THE FIRST CHRISTIAN SYNTHESIS

WE have seen that the New Testament literature arose in a spontaneous fashion—gospel, chronicle, epistle, homily, and apocalypse, each having its peculiar need to fulfill, and each responding to some conditions in the community life which called it forth. Often these needs were conditioned by the special localities in which the writings arose, and the books were thus an expression of the meaning of the Christian gospel for that place and time. That they had universal significance as well as one which was local and occasional needs no defense, for they have been read by generation after generation for nineteen hundred years, and there is no speech, no language, where their voice is not heard. But they were not intended by their writers as scripture for the ages.

The book of Revelation affords illustration of this fact. It was directed toward a particular need, the situation of persecution in Asia Minor under Domi-

tian. It was intended to show the Christians how they ought to conduct themselves in relation to the demand for participation in Emperor-worship. Much of the book is so conditioned by this special time and place that it is not understandable without the key of the historical situation to unlock its cryptic sayings. Nevertheless, it has its meaning for a world beyond that of Asia Minor in the first century. Wherever men are called to suffer for righteousness' sake, they take courage and inspiration from its summons, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life." [1] Wherever men see through religion new vistas of opportunity and promise, they echo its words, "Behold I have set before thee a door opened which no man can shut." [2] In the deep experiences of life men are lifted to courage by its picture of those who have come out of great tribulation, from whose eyes God shall wipe away every tear.[3]

So it is also with the little book of James. It had its purpose for its own time, which was probably near the close of the first century. It was a protest against the overemphasis on faith at the expense of the ethical side of religion. Perhaps some who were admirers of Paul had carried too far his principle of

[1] Rev. 2:10. [2] 3:8. [3] 7:13ff.

faith as central to Christianity,[4] and this author was concerned to show that "faith apart from works is dead." Although this discussion belonged to a special situation which is not duplicated in our world to-day, and which we do not expect to find duplicated, still the insight of the writer of this little sermon was such that he challenges us to-day by his classic description of the difficulty of being in full control of what we say, and by his noteworthy definition of ethical religion.[5]

The first three Gospels also had come into being in response to local and occasional needs. We have seen that the death of Peter was probably the immediate stimulus to the writing of Mark, and that this first gospel challenged other people to write for their own localities something similar to Mark, but more adequate for the communities that they knew. And again it is the inherent values of the writings themselves, rather than the intent of the authors that has given them their universal appeal. The Gospels have become the record of Jesus' life for all time and for all places. Their appeal is bounded by no geographical or temporal limits, but it is probable that their authors would have been greatly surprised if

[4] James 2:26. [5] 1:27.

they had been told that their works would have such a place in human history.

In certain respects the intent of the Fourth Gospel parallels this situation which we have just been describing, but in certain respects it differs. There are some aims apparent in the writing of the Gospel that show that it was directed to meet the given situation in Ephesus at the beginning of the second century. But there are other indications that the author thought of his work as having a meaning beyond that time and place. Inferences about the immediate situation for which he wrote may be drawn from several emphases of his thought. For example, he is at pains to show that John the Baptist was only the forerunner of Jesus, not himself the Messiah. "He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light." [6] In bearing witness to Jesus, John the Baptist is here shown as quite explicit about his own relationship to Jesus: "This is he of whom I said, He that cometh after me is become before me." [7] And when the question of his status is raised by his disciples, the Baptizer announces unequivocally: "Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him." [8] And finally

[6] 1:8. [7] 1:15. [8] 3:28.

he affirms, "He must increase but I must decrease." [9] It is hard to account for such a heavy stress on the subordinate position of John, except in order to meet just the situation that we know prevailed in Ephesus, where some "knew only the baptism of John." [10]

A second motive for the writing of the Gospel that we can trace as having direct relation to the immediate situation is the desire to show the genuine humanity of Jesus. The author wants his readers to be sure that Jesus' life was real, and not as the Docetists would say, only a seeming. In affirming that Jesus was the Logos, he guarded himself against making him a mere abstraction by his surprising statement, "The Word became flesh." [11] Jesus' thirst on the cross, the noting of blood and water pouring out when the soldiers pierced his side, and the tactual evidence presented to Thomas to convince him of Jesus' resurrection all testify to the fact that there was a question here in the community for which the Gospel was being written. There were people who said that Jesus did not actually live a human life, that he did not actually suffer, and that his participation in the things of this earth was only a seeming and not

[9] 3:30. [10] Acts 18:25. [11] 1:14.

a reality. For this group in the community, the Fourth Gospel took care to show the true humanity of Jesus.

Again, the author of the Gospel feels called upon to deal with the hostility of the Jews to the Christian movement. This was something that belonged to the world of the writer's experience rather than to the time of Jesus. True, there was opposition to Jesus from the scribes and Pharisees in Palestine, but the issues which rise between them are those of conduct, of the relation of Jesus and his followers to the Jewish Law. In the Fourth Gospel the issues are those that arise about the personality of Jesus, whether he was actually the Christ or not, what his relation was to the Father and to Abraham, and how it was possible for him to fulfill the claims that he made about himself. "The Jews, therefore, murmured concerning him, because he said, "I am the bread which came down out of heaven," [17] says this Gospel, and the question reveals itself even more fully as belonging to the Church and the Synagogue rather than to Jesus and the Pharisees, when in a later verse it appears as: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" [18] Here is the explanation for that sur-

[17] 6:41. [18] 6:52.

prising detachment from the actual situation that allowed the author of the Fourth Gospel to speak of Jesus' opponents under the inclusive caption "the Jews," when all who surrounded him actually were Jews, his disciples, his followers, his friends, and family, not to say himself. This author lived in the midst of Gentile society where the Church was commending itself to Gentiles, and one of its greatest problems was the opposition to it that came from the Synagogue. As he phrases the Gospel for this situation, he thinks of Jesus as dealing with some of these questions, and probably unconscious of anachronism, transfers the problems of his own time to that of Jesus and thinks of Jesus as speaking upon them.

In close relation to this purpose of meeting the hostility of the Jews to Christianity, is the writer's desire to give such attestation to the mission of Jesus that even those who questioned most should see the validity of his claims. In this Gospel Jesus is shown as calling upon Old Testament Scripture, upon his own words, upon his miracles, upon John the Baptist, and upon the Father to confirm his claims to belief.

> Ye have sent unto John, and he hath borne witness unto the truth . . . But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. And the Father that sent me, he hath borne witness of me.[14]

And speaking of the Scriptures, he says: "These are they which bear witness of me." [15] These appeals to the testimony that can be assembled to show that Jesus was what he claimed to be belong to the age in which the Gospel was being written, rather than to the age in which Jesus lived, and they too show the motivation of the Gospel for its own time.

In these ways which we have just noted we can see that the Fourth Gospel had, as the other writings of the New Testament had, a definite motivation for its own time. It was really dealing with some of the problems and controversies that belonged to the Christian society in the Gentile world at the beginning of the second century. But perhaps in a way

[14] 5:33ff. [15] 5:39.

that is peculiar to itself among the New Testament writings, it had also a purpose to show the permanent and abiding significance of Jesus. It was not merely a chronicle of the earthly life of Jesus that this author wanted to write. He yearned to show to the people of his time the eternal meaning of such a life, of such an embodiment of the love and purpose of God. As Professor Kenneth Saunders has put it, the writer had "brooded long and lovingly," [16] upon the experience of God that was possible through Jesus, and his work was designed to show how always men could find God through him.

In setting forth this permanent significance of the life of Jesus, the author of the Gospel has turned to many phases of experience. He finds Jesus meaningful in the world of thought as the eternal Logos or Word of God. He finds him quickening in the realm of feeling in the mystical aspects of religion. He discovers that he has significance in the world of fact and history, as a person who lived the life of God in the midst of time. He is confident also that there are values for the ethical life of mankind in Jesus, in his teaching about love as the basic law of life. These values that he sees in Jesus are not simply

[16] Saunders, *The Gospel for Asia*, p. 12.

for the time and place that surround him, but are for all time. The experience of Jesus is indeed to be a progressive experience enlarging as time goes on. "When the spirit of truth is come," he is to guide them into all truth.[17] There are many things to be said, but they cannot bear them now.[18] They are to do greater works in the future than it is possible to do now.[19] The enlarging life of the Church is in the view of the author as he writes, and it seems clear that he thinks of his interpretation of Jesus as one that points out the values which will be permanent and abiding in it.

And so while the Fourth Gospel has its particular message for its own time, its special attention to the controversies and interests of the Church in its own community, it has more than any other writing of the New Testament its face turned toward the future with the hope of stating the "good news" about Jesus in such a way as to show his enduring meaning. And as the writer found Jesus meaningful in all phases of his own life, so he thought of this manifold significance in the life of the Church. He interpreted Jesus in relation to the world of thought, of feeling, and of ethics, and the Gospel became in this way an

[17] 16:13. [18] 16:12. [19] 14:12.

actual synthesis of mystical, philosophical, and ethical religion, the first blending, indeed, in a literary work, in the development of Christianity, of these different aspects of religion.

This is not to say that the author of the Fourth Gospel set out in a deliberate and formal way to make a synthesis of the various types of religious experience and thought, which it was important to include if Christianity were to develop satisfactorily as a world religion. Nothing could be farther from the case. More than anything else this Gospel reveals itself as a work of spontaneity. Like the song of Shelley's skylark it comes forth from a full heart "in strains of unpremeditated art." It is a work of exaltation and of exultation, the product of rare and sublime genius. A deep personal experience of religion lies back of it, and only as the expression of such an experience can it be rightly understood. But in that sense of oneness with God which had come to the author through Jesus, there was something that satisfied the intellectual demands of his nature, something that was quickening of those deep feelings that are basic to religion, and something that challenged him to live nobly and fulfill the law of love in relationships with his brothers in Christ, and

all three of these aspects of the experience had to find a place in his story of it.

It is after all an unusual mingling of purposefulness for the future and of unstudied art that we find here. One must not fall into the error of supposing that we can fully analyze at this date the personal experience that went into the making of this Gospel. Its germination in thought, its development into the conscious expression of the written word, the full flower of its poetry and symbolism will always remain, for the most part at least, a hidden mystery, as little understood by us as the mysterious processes of life in the natural world. So is it with any work of genius. But so far as we can penetrate into the intention of the writer by scrutiny of his work, it would seem that he had a vision of the future life of the Church and was eager to state the permanent significance of Jesus for that expanding life—that this was his major purpose and motive. But as he wrote, many of the problems of his immediate environment pressed upon him and he directed himself to the answering of those questions as he went along. And as both these interests were being served, he brought together the various strands of his own experience of Jesus, the religion of mind,

heart, and action that he had entered into through Jesus, and produced in his writing, probably quite unconscious of its being such, the first Christian synthesis—a Christianity that had a theology, a mystical religious experience, and a principle for the practical handling of life. This was the task, and this the achievement of the Fourth Gospel.

CHAPTER VI

THE FOURTH GOSPEL AS ETHICAL RELIGION

In the previous chapter we have suggested that the Fourth Gospel makes a synthesis of mystical, intellectual and ethical religion, but it is clear that the religion which the Gospel advocates is preëminently mystical. The oneness with God which the writer has experienced through Jesus is to him the essential element in religion, and all other qualities that it possesses take their place in relation to this one which is basic. In a later chapter we shall be considering the distinguishing characteristics of the Johannine mysticism; but preliminary to that study we may well examine those two other important factors which make up the religion of the Gospel, its philosophy and its ethics. Let us turn first to the ethical side of the religion that the Gospel presents.

It is commonly thought that the Gospel's view of religion is weakest on the ethical side, and it is true that in comparison with the Synoptic Gospels the stress upon the "doing" side of religion is propor-

tionately small. J. Estlin Carpenter in his *The Johannine Writings* imagines the answer of the Johannine Jesus to the question of the rich young man, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" and says that the reply would be the words, "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly." "And he would have added," says Carpenter, "that it did not consist of doing anything, but in knowing God and Jesus Christ whom he had sent." [1] True as this statement is, however, it leaves us with something further to be said, for the question as to what it means to know God and Jesus Christ still needs to be answered.

In the discourse which is perhaps most descriptive of any in the Gospel of the mystical relationship which is central to its religion, that of the vine and the branches, love is the key word that describes the relationship:

> Even as the Father hath loved me, I also have loved you: abide ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love. . . . This is my commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you. Greater love

[1] J. Estlin Carpenter, *The Johannine Writings*, p. 387.

> hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.[8]

And whatever else is clear about the content of that term "knowing" as applied to the believer's relationship to God and Christ, it is certain that it is not mere intellectual assent to propositions about God and Christ. It is belief that Jesus was the Logos and unique Son of the Father, but it is something more. And when we try to define that "something more," the clue is in the concept of love. If one enters into the mystical relationship with God through Jesus, love is a part of it. It is not something that is added on as a result of knowing God; it is part and parcel of the experience of knowing him. "Ye are my friends if ye *do* the things that I command you."[8] And the new commandment which is given, and which sums up the qualifications for entering into this friendship is love.

How closely woven into the experience of knowing God this love-concept is, we may perhaps best appreciate if we compare the presentation here with that of Paul. Both Paul and the writer of the Fourth Gospel think of religion in terms of mystical relation-

[8] 15:9ff. [8] 15:14.

ship with God through Christ, and both of them lay stress on the ethical accompaniments of the experience, but for Paul, moral renewal, the virtues which make up the good life come as a result of the mystical oneness with God which he calls being "in Christ." He describes these virtues as "fruits of the Spirit." They constitute an increment to the life of the one who enters into the Christian experience, and who thereby becomes dead to sin.[4] "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control."[5] These moral fruits are the results of the new birth; they appear in the conduct of life because the mystical experience has been entered into.

For the Fourth Gospel, on the other hand, the correlation between love and the mystical experience of God through Jesus is so close that it is not possible to say that either one is antecedent to the other. Love is a part of the mystical experience itself. Love and belief are correlative terms and they seem to be presenting two sides of the same experience, an experience which could not be complete were either phase of it absent.

[4] Rom. 6:1.

[5] Gal. 5:22-23.

> I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father and I will love him and will manifest myself unto him.[6]
>
> And this is my commandment, that ye love one another even as I have loved you.[7]

The discourses of Jesus in the later chapters of the Gospel play upon this dual theme as a Wagnerian opera blends two motifs to make one tonal whole.

If love is so inherent a part of the mysticism of the Fourth Gospel, should we not now examine the Gospel to discover the actual part that it plays in the religion that the Gospel advocates? What is most easily apparent as we approach this study is the fact that the emphasis of the Gospel is not upon the practices that make up the ethical life, but upon the motive that prompts it. Here, perhaps, is to be found the reason for the current view that the Gospel is weak on the ethical side. We miss here the concrete handling of the problems of conduct that the Synoptic Gospels afford; but there is a compensating feature in the fact that the basis of the ethical life

[6] 14:20-21. [7] 15:12.

in motive is so clearly articulated, and that the ground for such motivation is sought in the very nature of God Himself.

The appeal of the Fourth Gospel for the life of love is, in the first place, one that gains its sanction from the nature of God. The fact that God loves is behind the life of Jesus making possible all that he does.

> Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing: for what things soever he doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth.[8]

And in the same fashion the love of God will reside in man and will be the root of religion in him. "My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." [9] If we may take the First Epistle as from the same hand as the Gospel, we find the author's thought more fully and explicitly developed in his assertions that God is love, and that love is of God. And the dignity of life so viewed, calls forth from the author the exclamation:

[8] 5:19-20. [9] 14:23.

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God." [10] Even if the Epistle should be thought of as coming from the hand of another than the author of the Gospel, it is perhaps not out of place to bring these assertions into our view at this time, since its author must be a disciple of the evangelist, if not the evangelist himself.[11] In the thought of both Gospel and Epistle, the life of love for man has its rootage in the conviction that love is at the heart of reality, the very nature of God Himself.

Love is conceived by this author as constituting the very nature of God. So also in his thought, love becomes the motive power in the life of the believer. It is affirmed that as the Father loves the Son, so the Son loves those who believe in him, and thus they abide in his love. Then follows the description of this experience as "keeping the commandment" and the definition of the commandment as "loving one another." [12] "These things I command you, that ye may love one another." [13] It is love that emerges in

[10] I John 3:1.

[11] For a discussion of the authorship of the First Epistle *see* J. Estlin Carpenter, *The Johannine Writings*, p. 457ff.

[12] Ch. 15. [13] 15:17.

"bearing much fruit" and it is love that causes a man to lay down his life for his friends. Greater love than this does not exist.[14] It is the major test of discipleship. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."[15] Again the words of the First Epistle make even more explicit this thought of love as the motive power of the ethical life. "For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments."[16] "This commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also."[17] The point of it is clear, that the life of oneness with God, which is religion in the view of this author, is a life motivated by love. Now it is the love of the brethren which is made the test of true love for God, and now it is affirmed that love for God as manifested in Jesus bears fruit in love of the brethren. The two sides of the experience are so closely interwoven in the thought of the writer, that he does not clearly differentiate cause from effect, but there is steady and insistent emphasis on the thought that love is the inner force which motivates the life of the believer.

Love is grounded in the very nature of God; it is

[14] 15:13. [15] 13:35. [16] I John 5:3. [17] I John 4:21.

the inner spring of conduct for the believer; it also supplies the method for dealing with the members of the Christian community. Those who make up the Christian group are to deal with each other in love. It is a new commandment that they love one another. And the method of handling life on such a basis is not left merely in the realm of abstract principle. There is concrete example for this life of love in the method of Jesus' dealing with the disciples. He calls them not servants but friends, and shares with them the purposes and aims of his work. His action in washing their feet at the time of his last supper with them is presented as the pattern of loving service which they are to follow. The act symbolizes his love for them: "Having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them unto the end." [18] But the symbol has a wider reference than within the group. It is treated as the eternal summons to loving service on the part of the disciples: "For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done unto you." [19]

But further, Jesus' dedication of himself to his mission is to be held by the disciples as the example

[18] 13:1. [19] 13:15.

for their work. It is a high commitment that is uttered in the words: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to accomplish his work." [20] But a dedication of the same high order is to lead the disciples forth to their work: "As thou didst send me into the world, even so sent I them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth." [21] The pattern of selfless devotion which has been set by Jesus is to be followed by the disciples in their work in the world.

As the ultimate ground of reality, as the guiding motive in conduct, and as the method by which one deals with his fellows, love plays a large part in the thought of the Gospel.[22] No higher ethical principle could be controlling in a presentation of religion. But in estimating its strength, we must not forget its limitations. The Gospel makes its ethical appeal upon a supremely high level and it gives great winsomeness to the ideal by presenting it in concrete embodiment in Jesus. But its scope seems to be bounded by the limits of the little Christian community struggling to find itself in the midst of a society

[20] 4:34. [21] 17:18.

[22] For a full treatment of the Johannine interpretation of Love *see* Moffatt, *Love in the New Testament*, Part D.

from which, if it would realize its life, it must at least in part isolate itself.

There is much in the Gospel to keep us conscious of this isolation of Jesus and his followers from "the world." It is not simply that "the Jews" are represented as opposing his mission on grounds of his blasphemy in making himself equal with God; [23] but in a more comprehensive fashion, it is stated that the world hates Jesus because he testifies of it that its works are evil.[24] The world's hatred of Jesus extends also to his followers and for it, Jesus offers comfort to his disciples, in the fact that they share it with him: "If the world hateth you, ye know that it hath hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." [25] Persecution will come as a result of this hatred—they will be put out of synagogues, and even put to death.[26] In the world they will have tribulation, but there is an inward peace which Jesus bestows, through which they are to achieve poise and a sense of victory. The adequacy of Jesus for whatever comes as a result of the world's hatred is expressed in his triumphant

[23] 10:33. [24] 7:7. [25] 15:18-19. [26] 16:2.

words: "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." [27]

But this relationship of Jesus and his followers to the world is a deeper thing than can be expressed merely in terms of liking or hatred. It goes down to the very nature of their life. In the very constitution of his being Jesus is not "of the world." "Ye are of this world; I am not of this world." [28] His kingdom is not of this world,[29] and his mission is but a temporary experience intervening between the glory which he had with the Father before the world was,[30] and that to which he goes after his death. "I came out from the Father, and am come into the world: again I leave the world, and go unto the Father." [31]

This separateness from the world which characterizes the work of Jesus also extends to his followers. They are the ones that the Father has given to him out of the world; [32] as he faces his death, he speaks of them as in the world, while he is no more in the world. While he was with them, he kept them and guarded them, but now he prays that in his absence from them they may be kept in that inward joy which is the result of oneness with God. He

[27] 16:33.
[28] 8:23.
[29] 18:36.
[30] 17:5.
[31] 16:28.
[32] 17:6.

prays not that they shall be taken out of the world but that they shall be kept from evil: [33] "They are not of the world even as I am not of the world.[34] His prayer, as he says, is not for the world, for as the world cannot receive the spirit of truth,[35] and cannot understand Jesus' mission because it does not know the Father,[36] so it cannot enter into this relationship of love which subsists between Jesus and his followers. These are his own who are in the world, whom he has loved unto the end;[37] the peace which he gives them, he gives not as the world gives; their hearts are not to be troubled and they are not to be fearful,[38] but they are to have his joy.[39] As the Father sent him into the world, even so does he send them into the world. But ultimately they are to be with him and behold his glory,[40] because they knew him and knew the Father as the world could not.

The question as to how the group of his followers is made up instantly arises, and we cannot help noting here that strange process of selection which is indicated in the line: "No man can come to me

[33] Ch. 17.
[34] 17:16.
[35] 14:17.
[36] 15:21.
[37] 13:1.
[38] 14:27.
[39] 17:13.
[40] Ch. 17.

except the Father draw him,"[41] and in other kindred passages. But we are faced here with a more immediate problem, in the paradox which the Gospel constantly presents in this separateness of Jesus and his followers from the world, and the note of universality which is repeatedly struck in the assertions of Jesus that his mission is to all men. In the discourses which tell of his significance for men, universality is implied in such phrases as:

> *Every one* that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him should have eternal life.[42]
>
> If *any* man eat of this bread, he shall live forever.[43]
>
> If *any* man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.[44]
>
> I am come a light into the world, that *whosoever* believeth on me may not abide in the darkness.[45]
>
> God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that *whosoever* believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life.[46]

In the prologue, Jesus is presented as the light that lighteth every man; in the meeting with the woman

[41] 6:44 [42] 6:40 [43] 6:51. [44] 7:37. [45] 12:46. [46] 3:16.

of Samaria, he seems to transcend national boundaries; and that inclusive ideal is made even more explicit in the prophecy of Caiaphas, the high priest, that Jesus should die "not for the nation only, but that he might also gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad." [47] Two utterances of Jesus give a clear sounding to this universal note: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself.[48] Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word." [49]

But the passage which brings the paradox before us in its sharpest form is the discourse which presents Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Here in Chapter Ten the two ideals appear side by side, and although one is stronger than the other, it is not strong enough to dismiss the other. On the one hand, the shepherd knows his own sheep, and they know him; they respond to him for they know his voice. Thieves and robbers are without the fold, ready to climb up, and kill, and destroy, but the Good Shepherd keeps them safe within the fold.

On the other hand, Jesus, in his rôle as Shepherd speaks of his other sheep, not of this fold, which he

[47] 11:52. [48] 12:32. [49] 17:20.

must bring. And ultimately they will all become one flock, under one Shepherd. Undoubtedly the emphasis is more upon the former thought, of separation from the perils without the sheepfold, and of the protection which the Shepherd affords from those perils; but just as is the case as in the remainder of the Gospel, the inclusive ideal presses for recognition, even though it is not strong enough to prevail.

J. Estlin Carpenter in his *Johannine Writings* says of this chapter:

> This is the most profound, but perhaps one of the least recognized, of the differences between the Synoptic presentation and the Johannine. Their pictures of the Good Shepherd are based on different ideals. The one sets out to search for the wanderer, heedless of weariness or want; the other is concerned with the safety of those within the fold, and his own power, if he lays down his life, to take it again.[50]

Here is the greatest limitation on the ethical side of the Johannine teaching. The consciousness of the isolation of the Christian community from the alien society in which it has to maintain its life has re-

[50] J. Estlin Carpenter, *The Johannine Writings*, p. 391.

stricted its vision of the social task of religion. We should not go to this Gospel, as we would to Paul, for stimulation toward the ideal of breaking down barriers between races and classes. There is no such stress here on the universal nature of Christianity as Paul gives to us in his declaration of religious freedom: "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for all ye are one man in Christ Jesus." [51] Nor do we find here in the Fourth Gospel that unconscious transcending of hitherto existing boundaries that we find in the Synoptic Gospels—boundaries between Samaritan and Jew, between publican and Pharisee, between the socially outcast and the socially respectable. Here the emphasis is on the intensive rather than the extensive aspects of religion. The Gospel urges an inner spiritual experience in which the love of man is a correlative to the love of God, but it accepts no responsibility for the evangelization of the world at large.

This is not to say that the Gospel presents an exclusive idea of Christianity. We have seen how the universal ideal repeatedly asserts itself. Glimpses of the Church in the world as a developed community

[51] Gal. 3:28.

seem to flash before the eyes of the author. The utter universality of worship is affirmed in the discourse of Jesus with the Samaritan woman where he says that true worship depends upon neither race nor place.[52] But the peculiar situation of the Church at the time of the writing seems to bring before the writer the urgency of an intensive cultivation of religion within the little group which has understood Jesus, and which must face inevitably the buffets of an unsympathetic world.

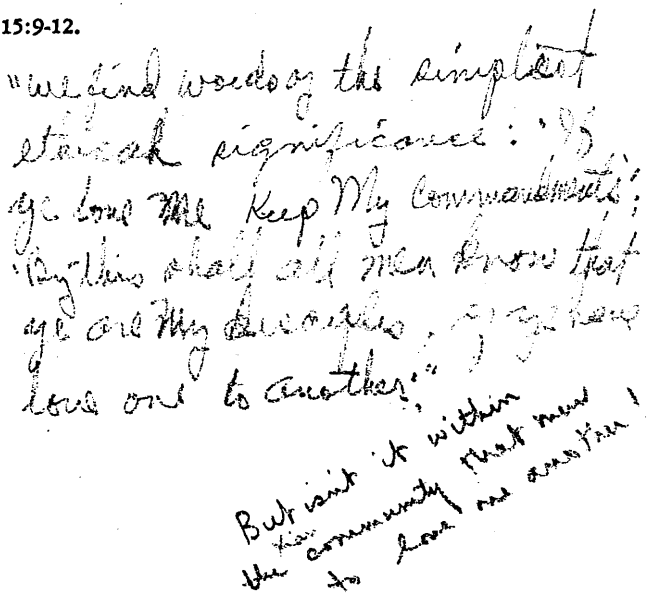
It must be granted that the major emphasis of the Fourth Gospel is upon the mystical experience of religion, and that the ethical expression of this mystical experience is thought of as having its scope mainly within the beloved community of believers, rather than outside in the world at large. But this view of religion is understandable in the light of the situation of the Church, and by it a major contribution is made to religion for all time. It was a true insight that made so close an integration as this author makes between love of the brethren and mystical oneness with God through Jesus. It is one of the great utterances in all religious literature of that correlation between the mystical and the ethical

[52] 4:20-23.

aspects of religion that we have in the words of this Gospel:

> Even as the Father hath loved me, I also have loved you: abide ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. . . . This is my commandment that ye love one another, even as I have loved you.[**]

[**] 15:9-12.



CHAPTER VII

THE FOURTH GOSPEL AS PHILOSOPHICAL RELIGION

THE first eighteen verses of the Fourth Gospel are a poetic prologue to the main story. They make oracular affirmations without explanation or amplification, as if they were dealing with a set of ideas already familiar to the readers of the Gospel, and as if the writer wished to put into these short, pregnant utterances the gist of the thought which the Gospel itself would later unfold. That the Word (Logos) was divine and preëxistent; that he was an agent in the creative process; that he became flesh and dwelt among men; that he brought life and light to men; that through him men become children of God; and that his medium of work with men was not law, but grace and truth—these are the assertions made.

But there is more than mere assertion. These declarations are presented with a studied attention to form which indicates the high significance that they held in the mind of the writer. Loisy has pointed out that in the first five verses we have ten propositions

presented in three groups, each of which contains three or four statements, whose relationship to each other in thought is emphasized by reproducing at the beginning of each statement the most important word in the preceding one:

In the beginning was the Logos,
And the Logos was with God,
And the Logos was divine.

The same was with God in the beginning.
Everything came into being through him;
And without him was not anything made that hath been made.

In him was Life;
And the Life was the Light of men.
And the Light shines in the darkness;
But the darkness did not receive it.

After verse five, the structure is not so consistently maintained, but it appears in part, and sufficiently to indicate to us that the musical swing of the prologue is not an accident, but the result of a carefully studied artistry of form.

What is the meaning of this solicitude for the reception which his message is to receive? What is the underlying reason for such concern for the introduction of the Gospel to its readers? J. Estlin Car-

penter speaks of the prologue as the "portico to the sanctuary within," [1] and Kenneth Saunders in his *Gospel for Asia* uses much the same figure, saying, "The Gospel is like the basilica in form and symbolism. The Prologue is a kind of porch of the Logos, with its three great arches of Light, Life and Love: and here we are prepared, as in the prologue of a Greek drama, for the mystery to be enacted." [2]

Whether this poetic introduction is an inherent part of the Gospel or not, whether it supplies the clue for the understanding of the interpretation of Jesus that is to follow, or not, is a question upon which various views have been expressed. Some have thought of it as not integral to the Gospel, but prefixed to it after the Gospel was completed to commend it to Greek readers.[3] Some have thought of the prologue as being a genuine summary of the ideas about Jesus which the Gospel sets forth.[4] Some have seen the closest affiliations of the Johannine Logos in the Logos conceptions of Heraclitus and the Stoics

[1] J. Estlin Carpenter, *The Johannine Writings,* p. 290.

[2] Kenneth Saunders, *The Gospel for Asia,* p. 11.

[3] Stanton, *The Gospels as Historical Documents,* iii, p. 170. *See* also Harnack's view in the *Ztschr. für Theologie und Kirche,* ii, p. 189f.; J. Estlin Carpenter, *The Bible in the Nineteenth Century,* p. 419, and his *Johannine Writings,* p. 338.

[4] Cf. E. F. Scott, *The Fourth Gospel,* p. 154ff.

as interpreted by Philo, while some have found it more closely related to the Hebrew personification of Wisdom, and have even suggested that it was based upon an already existing hymn in praise of Wisdom with the Logos term merely substituted for the term Wisdom.[5]

These are questions which are not easy of solution and for our purpose they need not be pursued in the hope of getting a final answer. As our primary interest is the Gospel's interpretation of religion, we need to seek the use that is made of this Logos doctrine rather than its origin and authorship. As has already been implied in the opening paragraph above, this interpretation of the prologue is based upon the assumption that the prologue does bear intimate and inherent relation to the Gospel itself, that it is introduced with the conscious intention of commending the ideas of the Gospel to a world already familiar with the Logos idea and interested in the philosophical implications of any presentation of religious experience. It is true that the word "Logos" in the philosophical sense does not again appear in the Gospel after the prologue, but the ideas with

[5] Cf. Burney, *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel,* or Rendel Harris, *The Origin of the Prologue to St. John's Gospel.*

which it is associated in the prologue, Life, Light, and (by implication) Love, do appear repeatedly throughout the Gospel and are the key words for its interpretation of religion. Each one of the main affirmations about the Logos in the prologue, except the assertion of his agency in the creative process, is amplified in Jesus' words about himself in the Gospel proper. Even this one is perhaps implied in the saying of Jesus about the glory which he had with the Father before the world was,[s] and in the assertion that the Father loved him "before the foundation of the world." [t] His preëxistence, his office as bringing Life and Light to men, his power to make men realize their sonship to God, his ministry of grace and truth are the repeated emphases of the Gospel itself, and these are the major assertions of the prologue.

The most striking statement in this prologue is the sentence, "And the Word became flesh." This has truly dramatic force. No one had ever said this before. Back in the sixth century B.C., Heraclitus had talked about a divine unity, the rational cause of all that comes to pass, and had given the name of Logos to that principle. The beautiful hymn of the Stoic, Cleanthes (c. 300 B.C.), singing of "One Word

[s] 17:5. [t] 17:24.

through all things everlastingly," epitomized in this phrase the Stoic thought of the Logos as the principle of reason immanent in both nature and man.

Hebrew thinkers, undoubtedly influenced by Greek philosophy, had come to speak of Wisdom as a principle akin to the Logos of Greek thought. Proverbs 8 which is a hymn to personified Wisdom allows her to say:

> Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way,
> Before his works of old.
> I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning
> Before the earth was.
> When there were no depths, I was brought forth;
> When there were no fountains abounding with water.
> Before the mountains were settled,
> Before the hills was I brought forth.[8]

Closer to the Greek thought of the Logos as a creative principle is the description of Wisdom in the book of Wisdom:

> She is breath of the power of God.
>
> She is an effulgence from everlasting light.
>
> And she, though but one, hath power to do all things,
> And remaining in herself, reneweth all things;
> And from generation to generation passing into holy souls
> She maketh them friends of God and prophets.[9]

[8] Proverbs 8:22-25. [9] The Wisdom of Solomon 7:25-27.

When the able and cultured Jew, Philo, took upon himself the task of harmonizing Jewish religion with the philosophy of Greece, this was one of the useful elements of Greek thought for his purpose. To connect a Platonic Absolute, or transcendent God with the humble life of man, to mediate between the cosmic interests of such a God and the religious needs of man, he found use for intermediary beings, "powers" or angels, and all such mediating beings he gathered together under the inclusive caption "Logos," or "logoi." God's creative activity he thought of as continually going on through the agency of these beings: "God never ceases the work of creation which he accomplishes through the agency of the Logos." [10]

Many other systems of thought in the syncretistic world of the first and second centuries picked up this concept and made use of it, and we may think of it as current coin in the interchange of religious thought and speech. Probably the author of our Gospel was acquainted with Philo's interpretation and borrowed the concept from him, not, to be sure, without modifications, but following a similar line of

[10] *De Cherubim.*

interpretation.[11] And as we have seen, he had no need to expound his meaning in employing it, for he could count upon his readers to be familiar with it, and to understand its general import. In a sense, however, his usage was new.

What was new and distinctive about his use of it was his identification of the Logos with a person. This was original; and this would challenge his readers to ask what manner of man this was, who could be said to embody the purposive and creative energy of God.

But the strange thing is that having made this startling and dramatic statement, the author turns directly to a narrative of the earthly life of Jesus. It is no metaphysical treatise that he wishes to write, but the story of a life. His interest is focussed not upon the Logos as such, but upon Jesus living and dying upon earth. Jesus as the Logos lived a life of special significance; all his acts and words were endued with divine meaning because he was the

[11] *See* Grill's study of the similarities between Philo and the Fourth Gospel both in ideas and in language in *Untersuchungen über die Entstehung des vierten Evangeliums I.*, p. 106ff. For the relation of the Logos in the Fourth Gospel to the Logos in Philo, *see* E. F. Scott, *The Fourth Gospel,* p. 148ff.

Logos of God, but the writer's central concern is not the Logos, but Jesus.

What then, is the significance, for the Gospel's interpretation of religion, of the use of the term Logos in the prologue, and of the ideas for which it stands in the body of the writing? Surely it is not that the "good news" of Christianity has become now a philosophy, a system of metaphysical thought. It is rather that the story of Jesus is being presented in such a way as to commend itself to those who were familiar with philosophical thought and who, if they were to be a part of the Christian community, must find some relation between the Christian interpretation of life and that which the speculative thinkers of the time were offering.

This attempt to place the Christian message in relation to the philosophy of the Western world is seen not only in the use of the term Logos and of the ideas for which it stands, but in the Gospel's steady emphasis upon *truth* as a necessary and inherent part of religion. Twice in the prologue the work of the Logos is described as having the qualities of grace and truth.[18] Jesus points to himself as the Way, the Truth and the Life,[18] and tells his disciples that they

[18] 1:14, 17. [18] 14:6.

shall know the truth and the truth shall make them free.[14] One of the functions of the Spirit is to lead the disciples forward in truth, and in this passage the designation for that abiding presence of the divine is "the spirit of truth." [15] In the discourse to the Jews (Chapter 8) Jesus identifies his message with truth, and says that those who seek to kill him are doing so because they do not stand in the truth.[16] When he stands before Pilate, he summarizes the purpose of his mission as bearing witness unto the truth,[17] and says that everyone that is "of the truth" will heed him.

This insistence upon the trustworthiness of the message shows a concern on the part of the author to appeal to men's minds as well as to their hearts. Remembering always that his major purpose is the sharing of a religious experience and that he cannot do without the kindling of men's feelings, still we cannot but see that it matters deeply to him whether this interpretation of life is to be held as sound. Religion must be part of "the truth" if it is to hold its proper place in the experience of man.

In order to gain this intellectual assent to his interpretation of Jesus, the author has had recourse to

[14] 8:32. [15] 16:13. [16] 8:44-46. [17] 18:37.

various appeals, some of which have little meaning for us to-day in our estimate of Jesus, but which are, nevertheless, revealing of the author's desire to commend his Gospel on intellectual grounds. The miracles are presented as "signs" of his divine origin and life;[18] the testimony of John the Baptist,[19] the witness of the Old Testament,[20] the evidence of his own words, and that of the Spirit of Truth are all cited in proof of the fact that Jesus was what he claimed to be, the unique Son of God. A larger attestation is seen also in Jesus' majestic handling of his own life. His complete knowledge of, and control over, persons and circumstance indicate a figure of such unique strength that appreciation of him is compelled by the very apprehension of what he was and did. The story of Jesus which the Gospel tells is more than a mere story. It is an appeal to the intellectual appreciation of the manner of man that he was.

But there is a larger sense in which the Gospel was directing the Christian message into intellectual channels. It was giving it a theology capable of meeting the philosophical questions of its time. The Western world was not interested in the apocalyptic

[18] 10:37; 11:15, etc. [19] 5:33. [20] 5:39.

emphases of the earlier presentations of Jesus. It was not at home in the world of thought represented by the Jewish concepts of the Kingdom, the Messiah, and the Day of the Lord. But it could understand and appreciate the Christian message, when those concepts had been interpreted and rephrased in terms of their spiritual equivalents, and this was exactly what the Fourth Gospel had attempted to do.

We do not find the Kingdom discussed in this Gospel, but its place is taken by the emphasis upon *eternal life.* Of course there are some losses here. We miss the clear articulation of the ethical content of religious experience that the Synoptic Gospels give in their stress on the Kingdom ideal. But there is a corresponding gain on the spiritual side in the interpretation of eternal life as a quality of living, possible here and now, with the emphasis not upon duration, but upon those inward aspects of it which transcend both time and place.

The concept of the judgment has been taken out of its apocalyptic framework (except in one of two instances where the author dropped back unconsciously into the earlier mode of thought)[21] and has

[21] 5:28; 6:44.

been interpreted as a process going on all the time, according as men do or do not respond to Jesus, and believe in him as the unique Son of the Father: "And this is the judgment, that light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light." [23]

In the same fashion the thought of a second coming of Jesus at a definite time and place which was characteristic of the early presentations of Christianity has been here definitely rephrased in terms of an inward and spiritual presence, always abiding in the hearts of believers. In the thought of this Gospel there is no moment in time at which the present order is to be swept away and the Son of Man come "in his glory and all the angels with him." [23] It is, rather, here an abiding experience of the indwelling Lord:

> Yet a little while, and the world beholdeth me no more; but ye behold me: because I live, ye shall live also. In that day, ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.[24]
>
> If a man love me, he will keep my word: and

[23] 3:19. [23] Matt. 25:31; Mark 13:26, etc. [24] 14:19-20.

my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."[88]

The "little while" is only the shortest possible interval between the moment of his physical death and the establishment of his new and fuller relationship of oneness with his disciples in the realm of the eternal and the spiritual.

And to return once more to the interpretation of Jesus as the eternal Logos, again the Gospel is bringing the Christian message into harmony with the accepted modes of thought in the Western world. Jesus had lived and died, a Jewish teacher of religion. The Synoptic authors had seen in him the Messiah, the fulfillment of the highest hopes of the Jewish past, and had begun the process of universalizing his mission by speaking of him as "Son of God" or "Son of Man" through whom salvation could come not to Jews only but to Gentiles as well. The process of Hellenization of the Christian message was bound to come in time in a world where there was so much interchange of thought as there was in the world about the Mediterranean basin in the first and second centuries of our era. Paul's great utter-

[88] 14:23-24.

ances about the universality of Christianity: "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for all ye are one man in Christ Jesus," [26] had already sounded a call to the universal interpretation of the Gospel, and his own presentation of Jesus as the risen Christ, through whose indwelling presence one entered into a religious experience of freedom and joy, had made Christianity available to the Western world.

In line with Paul's work, but carrying it farther, the author of the Fourth Gospel felt the need of a more definite rephrasing of the story of Jesus to meet the demands and the questions of the more philosophically minded religious folk of the Hellenistic world. By his use of the Logos concept and his treatment of Jesus in relation to it, he seems to be saying something like this:

> Your philosophers have talked for centuries of a principle or reason in the universe; they have seen that the world is not a chaos, but a cosmos, and that reason is basic in it. A life has been lived in complete harmony with that prin-

[26] Gal. 3:28.

> ciple, by Jesus of Nazareth, whose story you may read. That harmony is not merely an abstraction, as it sometimes seems in philosophy. It is a religious experience. Jesus lived a life of oneness with God, so that he became a medium of Life, Light, and Truth to men. His life of Oneness with God can be appropriated by men, so that through him, they also may enter into an experience of religion which means eternal life.

But it was no such prosaic wording as this that the author of the Fourth Gospel gave to his great thesis. A poetic prologue that is music in itself; a story of Jesus which the writer uses as a medium, much as a painter uses color and form to body forth some inner conception that he deeply feels; a series of metaphors that put the meaning of Jesus into terms of the simple goods of life—water, bread, light, and truth; an urgency of feeling which makes us realize that this is no abstract philosophy, but a personal experience of religion which has taken hold so deeply that the author cannot rest until he share it.

There are appeals to feeling in this interpretation. These are his medium, and they must not be depre-

ciated in our estimate of the Gospel. But giving full value to them, there is still clear a motivation for the writing, in the desire to show forth Jesus and the religious experience which one has through him, as harmonious with the best philosophical thought of the time. The author was concerned to show that it was not only grace that came by Jesus Christ, but truth as well. And this assertion was no minor or secondary consideration in his own philosophy of religion. He reveals both in explicit word and in his handling of the material his own deep conviction that it is the truth that makes men free.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FOURTH GOSPEL AS MYSTICAL RELIGION

CANON STREETER in *The Four Gospels,* says that the "starting-point for any profitable study of the Fourth Gospel is the recognition of the author as a mystic—perhaps the greatest of all mystics." [1] This is a point of view which we have been maintaining in the two preceding chapters, each of which has turned to the specific study of another phase of the religion of the Gospel. We have seen that the Gospel's interpretation of religion demands a recognition of ethical values; it also has genuine concern for the philosophical implications of its teaching, and yet there is a sense in which both of these aspects of religion are over-arched by the mystic's view that religion is an intimate and immediate experience of God, and that this experience goes beyond both ethics and philosophy. The central definition of religious experience that the Gospel offers is the word of Jesus: "This is life eternal that they should know thee the

[1] Streeter, *The Four Gospels,* p. 366.

only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." [2] It is this knowing—this individual consciousness of God which one has through Jesus that is to him the heart of religion.

Mysticism is a term of such wide scope and such diverse meaning that we need to ask what the kind of mysticism is that the Gospel advocates? The term alone is not sufficiently descriptive, because it has been used so loosely to cover all the range of religious phenomena from the primitive practices of shamanism to the ecstasy experienced by philosophers in their contemplation of reality. To use the term "mysticism" does not delineate the features of Johannine religion. It merely classifies it in a large and indeterminate category, and we need to seek a closer understanding of the actual content of thought and experience that it advocates, if we are to enter into a realization of its meaning and value.

One way to that understanding which we seek is to see, first of all, how it differs from some familiar examples of mystical religion. At the mention of the word "mysticism" our thought turns instantly to India whence some have claimed the inspiration for the Fourth Gospel's interpretation of religion came.

[2] 17:3.

Here of course there is no uniformity in the manifold types of religion that may be designated as mystical. But let us take as our example the typical mysticism of the Upanishads where the goal of religion is thought of as the loss of individuality which takes place as one is merged in the Changeless One—the Changeless which is everything because it includes all the universe, but which is nothing because it has dispensed with all distinctiveness and transcends such accidents as thought and speech. This is indeed far removed from the type of experience that the Gospel advocates. The character of the mystical state always takes its color from the character of the object of worship, and the God of the Fourth Gospel is not an abstraction like the Changeless One of the Upanishads, but the Father whose salient characteristic is love; love not merely of the Son, but of those who believe on him through the Son. So in its turn religious experience does not suggest in the Fourth Gospel loss of individuality, but a heightening of it. Fuller knowledge of the truth, greater works to be done, greater love to be entered into—all lie ahead for those who take upon themselves the discipleship of Jesus.

But if we look to another type of mysticism to

which our thought inevitably turns, that of the medieval saints of the Christian Church, again we find divergence from the religion of our Gospel. With all the wide variety that one finds in medieval mysticism, and there is of course much diversity according to the temperament, environment, and theological background of its many exponents, there is still a characteristic pattern for the saint's life in the *via negativa* which leads to the vision beatific. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Theresa, St. John of the Cross all typify this acceptance of the austere path of renunciation, and often of mortification, as the road to the vision of God. As St. Bernard put it, their goal of life was to be self-dissolved as the drop of water is lost if poured into a large measure of wine. The conditions of self-mortification—hunger, thirst, self-inflicted pain, isolation from one's fellows—provide too often the conditions of self-delusion, and the heaping up of these restrictions tends to limit religion to a narrow round.

It is immediately clear, if we have entered into the Gospel's thought at all, that the Johannine mysticism never commends this way of renunciation. There is nothing of the method of denial or negativism in its program of life. On the contrary, it holds out before

us an ideal of an abundant life. Jesus came that men might have life, and have it abundantly. Men are to know the truth and the truth is to make them free. Greater works than those which Jesus himself did are to be done by those who follow him, and they are to think of themselves not as servants, but as friends, because the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth, and they are to be full participants in the purposes and work of Christ.

The type of mystical religion which we might expect to stand closest to that of our Gospel, because in point of time it is nearest, is that which is characteristic of the mystery religions, those popular religious cults which were flourishing in the Mediterranean world at the time that the Gospel was produced. But here again there is little affinity with the thought of the Gospel. These cults stood for one rapturous, ecstatic experience of deity, entered into at the time of initiation. They made use of magic passwords and symbols, had set rites and formulas, special times and seasons at which one could expect to have this experience of the divine. They advocated preparatory ascetic exercises, and strove to preserve an atmosphere of secrecy and mystery about their ceremonial occasions, and often these rites were crude and bar-

baric, partaking more of the nature of orgies than of religious festivals.

None of these characteristic elements of the mystery cults appears in the religion of the Fourth Gospel. Just as it has freed itself from the angels and demons of contemporary Jewish religion, so it has freed itself completely from these inferior elements of Hellenistic popular religion. Even the mystery cult at its highest as it appears in the eleventh book of the Metamorphoses of Apuleius in the story of the initiation of Lucius into the cult of Isis, with its soberer view of religion, and its æsthetic interpretation of religious experience differs radically from the Gospel. At the basis of religion in the Isis cult, there is a mythical personage; central in the Gospel is an historical person. The gateway to life in the Isis cult is ceremonialism; in the Gospel it is experience of a person that gives the abundant life.

And so we might go on, examining varying types of mystical religion, and coming gradually into a realization of the quality of the Johannine mysticism through feeling these differentiating characteristics. But perhaps we shall do well at this point to come nearer home and look at an interpretation of religion which lies closer to our Gospel than any of these

which we have just been examining. The mysticism of Paul has several points in common with that of the Gospel. Both Paul and the Fourth Gospel present a mystical experience that is Christ-centered. Both set as the goal of religion an experience of God which is arrived at through oneness with the risen and exalted Christ. Both have their roots ultimately in the Hebrew tradition of prophethood, however much they may have been touched by the currents of thought in the Hellenistic world; and as a result of this, both coördinate closely the experience of God with the ethical life among one's fellows. Both think of this oneness with God as bringing a new quality into life. Paul speaks of being a "new man in Christ Jesus," while the Fourth Gospel says that one begins by being born again. Both think of the experience as coming by revelation, and being appropriated by man not because his own effort has won it for him, but because he has accepted Jesus as his Lord.

With all these points of similarity, however, these two presentations of mystical experience are not identical. And as we see how the Fourth Gospel has departed from Pauline thought, the positive content of its religion takes form before us. Perhaps what

strikes us first is the difference in the medium used to describe religion. Paul is the missionary, writing to his flock, telling them of his own personal experience of Jesus, advocating to them that which has meant most to him in life. His letters were the eager outpouring of a leader's concern for those who were dependent upon him for guidance. They are not an attempt at a consistent, ordered presentation of his religion. He gave himself to his people, and because religion was so vital and all-embracing an experience in him, this was the major content of his gift. But the result of this kind of presentation is that the experience of religion which he advocates becomes charged with the energy and dynamic power of the person who writes of it. When Paul says, "but one thing I do" or "for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain," [8] and then urges his readers to let their own lives "be worthy of the gospel of Christ," his own exuberant faith seems to dominate the whole conception of what religion is. Sometimes his eagerness is so great that the sentences tumble over each other, and coherence is almost lost in the overwhelming desire to tell that which defies telling by its magnitude and strength.

[8] Phil. 1.

Now the Fourth Gospel, being far more meditative in its mood, seems to give a different quality to its religion by that very fact. Who the person was behind this lyrical meditation upon Jesus we do not know. Someone who had experienced Jesus deeply, someone who had the poet's way of interpreting him, a great lover, a true mystic—but who was he? As against the abounding forcefulness of Paul, we see here the working of a meditative mind, no less fully consecrated to the discipleship of Christ, but expressing its religion through channels that are more contemplative than energetic. Subtle as this difference is, when it comes to the interpretation of the mystical experience which is central to religion in each case, it is real, and recognizable. The mysticism of Paul means being "caught up into the third heaven." The mysticism of John means abiding in Jesus as the branches abide in the vine. Through mystical oneness with God through Jesus, one found power; the other, peace. "I press forward" is the characteristic note of Pauline religion; "ye in me, and I in you" is the dominant mood of the Johannine.

If we carry this distinction a bit farther and ask what it means, not only in the mood of the participant, but also in the actual content of the experience

itself, we find that Paul goes back always to his own crisis on the Damascus road, where Jesus appeared to him "as to one untimely born." [4] Later mystical experiences were also described in terms of ecstasy: "Whether in the body, I know not; or whether out of the body, I know not. God knoweth. Such a one caught up even to the third heaven . . . How that he was caught up into Paradise and heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter." [5] He never prescribes rules for his converts as he thinks of their entering into this mystical oneness with Christ, but it is clear throughout that he wants them to enter into this relationship which has made life for him. Ecstasy, vision, illumination—these were all in it, and all of it was the gift of God. If he were to set down, as he did not, the specific character of the religious experience into which he hoped his converts might enter, it is probable that these factors would be central. This is not to disregard the intellectual features of Paul's own religious life. His great arguments upon the themes of predestination, justification, glorification are of great importance to him, but he does not look upon such argument as prerequisite for, or an essential element

[4] I Cor. 15:8. [5] II Cor. 12.

in the mystical oneness with Christ which he wants for his converts. They rest as a kind of superstructure, upon a religious foundation which he calls "being in Christ." Nor is it to disregard, on the other hand, the ethical aspects of religion, for these also were vital to him. But here also he is dealing with something that comes after one has entered into the supreme relationship with Christ. Love, joy, peace, and the other virtues that make up the ethical life are "fruits of the spirit." They come as result, rather than make up the central experience of religion.

Now although the Fourth Gospel is more explicit than Paul is in speaking of a new birth as the gateway to the life of oneness with God through Jesus, it nevertheless does not imply an ecstatic experience which brings this gift to men. We cannot think of the Fourth Gospel as advocating a cataclysmic change in which one put off the old man and put on the new. For the Johannine conception of religion the processes of the mystical life were more gradual, more progressive, more contemplative. The illumination which comes to man by his fellowship with Jesus who is the Light of the world is no less complete, no less mysterious, no less a gift from heaven than in

Paul's thought, but it came about more gradually, not in a sudden, ecstatic revelation, but as a result of "abiding" in Christ. The figure of the vine and the branches is the perfect metaphor for bodying forth the Johannine view of the mystical life.

And this leads us to another important difference in these two views of religion. So far as his letters are concerned, Paul was satisfied to disregard almost completely the content of Jesus' life and teaching. If we were dependent upon these letters alone for our knowledge of Jesus, we should know that he lived and taught; that he had a group of disciples, by one of whom he was betrayed; that on the night in which he was betrayed, he ate a supper with his disciples and asked them to continue having a similar meal together after his death in remembrance of him; that he died, rose again from the dead, and was seen by his disciples in resurrection appearances. For Paul, the fact that Jesus lived, died, and rose again are the focal points of the Gospel.

How significant it is for his view of religion that the author of the Fourth Gospel chose the biographical form as his medium for presenting his thought of what Christian experience is! The appeal that he makes for Christianity is based upon a reverent con-

templation of the earthly life of Jesus. What he did and what he said are of supreme importance. To be sure, his works and words are significant not simply on a basis of their intrinsic merit, but also because they stand for more. They carry into life the functions of the Logos of God, but the symbolism does not displace history. John could not have dispensed, as Paul did, with the content of Jesus' life. It mattered greatly to this author what manner of life Jesus lived.

One more difference between Paul's mysticism and John's must be noted before we leave this comparison. We have already spoken of how both of them, being more Jewish than they are Greek, feel the importance of ethics for religious experience. It is an integral part of religion for both of them. And yet it is interesting to see how differently they handle the relationship of the ethical to the mystical life. As we have already said, Paul treats the ethical life as a result of being "in Christ." If one enters into this relationship, he is a new creature;[6] he puts off the old man and puts on the new;[7] virtues are fruits of the spirit: "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

[6] II Cor. 5:17. [7] Col. 3:9-10.

meekness, self-control; against such there is no law. And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof." [8] The struggle between the flesh and the spirit will be won when he has been crucified with Christ, and as a result: "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me." [9]

For the Fourth Gospel, on the other hand, the transition from the old life to the new is not so clearly defined. There is no putting off of the old and putting on of the new. But the concept of love, under which is summed up all that makes up the ethical life for this author, is presented as so closely identified with that of belief, which sums up in its turn the mystical relationship to Jesus, that one can hardly tell where love begins and belief leaves off, and *vice versa.* They are part of the same experience; neither is the result of the other; neither precedes the other; they are two sides of the same shield. The mystical oneness with Christ, which the Gospel equates with "eternal life" is a growing, abiding experience in which love is an essential element. In other words, the Johannine mysticism has drawn ethics and God-consciousness into the closest possible

[8] Gal. 5:22-24.

[9] Gal. 2:20.

relationship. To have oneness with God through Jesus is to have love in control.

As we look back now upon the comparison that we have made between the Johannine mysticism and the other forms which we have chosen to examine, the positive content of the religious experience that the Gospel advocates begins to take shape before us. The Gospel is saying that there is an experience of God that we may attain through Jesus. This mystical oneness is the abundant life; it is timeless; it is a quality of living here and now, not something to be attained after death. The quality that characterizes it is love, and that love has been fully manifested in Jesus. Because that is true, his life on earth, both its activity and its teaching, is of great importance, and one who enters into the experience of God through him will do so best by the reverent contemplation of that life. It is important in and of itself and it is important because all that he did and said has the wider and deeper meaning that comes from his being the eternal Logos of God. Truth was embodied in him, as well as love.

This was a presentation of religion that had deep significance for the Western world in the early part of the second century. Incipient Gnosticism was put-

ting forth fantastic theories of knowledge and of the journey of the soul up through the spheres to the realms of light where oneness with the divine was achieved. Already a special form of Gnosticism known as Docetism was applying this kind of doctrine to the Christian faith, affirming that Jesus as a representative of the Divine could not have really lived an earthly life, and only seemed to do so. Mystery cults were offering salvation and a blessed immortality to their adherents if they participated in cultic ceremonies supposed to identify them with some mythical divine hero. Moral philosophies in a popular guise were appealing to those who were too sophisticated to accept the cruder forms of religion.

The Christian community was divided. Some found their greatest inspiration in the Pauline interpretation with its mystical emphasis. Some felt that the mystical side of Christianity had been overemphasized and, like the author of the little book of James, laid stress on the moral content of the Christian life. Some in situations of danger had gone back to Jewish apocalypticism and had satisfied their longings in dreams of a glorious future brought in by cataclysm, as pictured in the book of Revelation.

In the midst of such diversity of interpretation the

author of our Gospel comes forward with an interpretation of Christianity which is primarily mystical, but which has embodied in it the values of philosophy and the moral life as well. Dismissing uncompromisingly the fantastic theories of the Gnostics and the mythology of the cults, it yet affirms that eternal life is the life of oneness with God. But it has seen the importance of grounding its mystical interpretation of life in history. Instead of a mythical hero-god it offers a savior who has lived a real life and died a real death.

At the same time it offers an interpretation of Jesus as the eternal Logos which places him in relation to the contemporary world of philosophy, and makes it possible for one to accept him, not only as savior, but also as a gateway to truth. It has so integrated the moral life of man with this mystical experience of God through Jesus that Love comes into control in the very process of religious mysticism, and ethics and religion are made one. It has, moreover, dismissed the childlike apocalyptic views that Christianity inherited from Judaism and found the equivalents of them in the realm of the spiritual. Eternal life is not a future possession in a far-off heavenly realm but a quality of living now. The

judgment is not an event at the end of a world, but a process going on every day in the response men make to Jesus. The second coming of Jesus is not to be looked for in the future on clouds of glory, but has already taken place in the hearts of his believers in his abiding, indwelling presence.

This integration of the mystical, moral, and philosophical values of religion was the greatest gift that the Gospel made to its own time. But it is a great gift to ours as well. This is the kind of mysticism that is needed in our time, as well as in the Hellenistic world of the early Christian era. Mysticism is inherent in the very nature of religion. As Professor W. P. Montague has said in his *Ways of Knowing,* there "lies at the heart of all religion" the belief "that the soul of man can somehow unite itself with the substance of the universe." [10] The ever-present danger of mysticism is that it may divorce itself from the ways of reason and the path of morals. In the thought of the Fourth Gospel no such divorce took place. It is one of the chief evidences of the genius of its author that he intuitively preserved in vital unity the three great phases of religious experience. The center and core of his Christianity is mystical,

[10] Montague, *The Ways of Knowing,* p. 56.

but the mysticism is balanced always by a deep concern both for the historical person of Jesus as the embodiment of ultimate truth, and for the ethical character of his way of life.

CHAPTER IX

THE RELIGION OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL IN OUR MODERN AGE

WE started our study of the Fourth Gospel with the realization that it presents a problem to many of its readers to-day. If one must subordinate it to the Synoptics as an historical record of the words and works of Jesus, what place is it to take in the literature of Christianity? If its great discourses are not the verbatim record of the words of Jesus, are they meaningful to us at all? Many people to-day are troubled by this question, and because the Gospel has been so loved, the problem takes on a poignancy that it would not have if it were centered about a work that had less hold upon our affections.

As we have seen, however, the distinctive characteristics of the book, have caught some glimpses of the age for which it was written, and of the purpose that it had in relation to the needs of its own day, the problem seems less great. Less and less does the Gospel present itself as a competitor with the Syn-

optic Gospels. More and more does it differentiate itself from them in character and intent. And hence, we come to see its value in another field from theirs. As an interpretation of religious experience, the book has its own standards of authenticity, but they are different ones from those which we use to measure factual accuracy. It was great perception on the part of the author which led him to use history as the basis for his interpretation of religious experience, and the task would never have been so successful without it, but history did not take the first place with him. Christian experience was his dominant interest and he selected from the stories current about Jesus those which served his purpose best in portraying what it meant to enter into life through him. "Many other signs therefore did Jesus . . . which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye may believe . . . and that believing ye may have life." [1] And as we have seen, he adapted these stories with considerable freedom to his own purpose, putting the spirit always above the letter.

In the light of this purpose on the part of the author the problem of the particular authorship of the Gospel becomes subordinate. If an experience of

[1] 20:31.

Jesus is what the author wishes to tell, rather than a consecutive, ordered, factually accurate story of his life, then the question of whether he himself beheld the events is not of primary importance. Peter who was the first interpreter of Jesus to the early Christian community had experienced Jesus through being with him in the daily fellowship of every-day event. Paul, that other great mediator of Christianity, had never seen Jesus, save as he saw him in vision with the perceptions of the spirit. But each was able to give an interpretation of Christian experience that was authentic and that answered to the needs of the human spirit. Granted that the writer of the Gospel, even though he valued history, put it second to the communication of experience, then the question as to whether he was an eyewitness or not of the events he narrates is not the chief question. In either case, whether eyewitness or not, he had, by long contemplation, made the story a part of himself before he wrote. "He expresses his own experience in interpreting his Lord." [2] Events are important, but they are not as important as the meaning of events, and it is their meaning of which he wishes to speak. With true perception this author read the needs of

[2] Saunders, *The Gospel for Asia*, p. 12.

his own time; with true insight he saw what the Christian gospel could bring to that age; with an experience of Jesus in his own life, he could speak with authority of the message of Christianity to that age. The standards of authenticity which one applies to this sort of work are different from those which one would apply to a work that set out to be history pure and simple.

But this attempt to measure the Gospel in the light of its own purpose and character leads us on to another question. Granted that it did have a real message for its own day, has it still a message for ours? Much of the interpretation of Christianity in our own day has tended to emphasize the values of Synoptic study. To recover the actual life of Jesus, to see him as he lived among men, to hear his words, has been the objective of much of our recent inquiry. To push back of the interpretations of him that all the centuries have given—back to the real Jesus of history—surely this is a real need of our time.

But this emphasis has tended to minimize the values of a study that turns primarily to the interpretation of Jesus. And in some ways our age is as greatly in need of interpretive insights about Jesus as it is of the recovery of the facts of his life and teach-

ing. After the facts have been as fully recovered as they may be, there still remains the question for those who are to approach Christianity thoughtfully: What shall we do with them? In relation to our total philosophy of life, what are we to think about Jesus? It is to the answer of this question that the Fourth Gospel has a peculiar contribution to make.

As we look about our own world of thought, its problems are clearly not identical with those of the Mediterranean world at the end of the first century. Not in the form of Gnosticism, apocalypticism, or Jewish hostility do we find our challenges to Christianity to-day, but we do find some real similarities between our own religious world and that into which the Gospel first came.

Just as in the first century A.D. in the Mediterranean basin, Christianity in America to-day is living in a world in which the old standards of authority have broken down. To-day, as in Hellenistic times, men are seeking for guidance in life through new channels, because the standards both of thought and of conduct which prevailed in the previous generation have lost their significance for us. Just as in the first century A.D., Christianity in our Western world to-day is undergoing rapid change, because of a fu-

sion of cultures which is bringing diverse elements of thought together. Just as in the Christian world to which the Gospel originally offered its message, specialized religious interests are receiving stress in different quarters, but few people are able to take a view of the whole which is able to unify or harmonize those interests. In the first century this specialization was seen in the stress on the ethical aspects of religion by those with Jewish background and sympathy;[2] in the desire to philosophize about Christianity on the part of those who represented the Greek intellectual tradition; and in the attempt to make of Christianity a redemption religion with mystical experience at its center, on the part of those with the popular religious interests of the contemporary world at heart. To-day, although the incentives to specialization are different from those which operated in the first century, we find it far easier to analyze our religious life than to synthesize it, and the same tendency to specialization of interest is common to our time.

The ethical appeal of Christianity has stirred our age deeply. Perhaps the most characteristic rôle in which Christianity appears in our time is in its sum-

[2] Cf. The homily of James in the New Testament.

mons to us to build a better world. Some of the finest prophets of our time are those who are urging us in season and out of season to order our social life so that the oppressions of race, war, capitalism, and industrialism shall no longer fall upon our people. But those who are committed most deeply to these ethical tasks of Christianity in our time look wistfully for help from the directions of philosophy and individual religious experience. They know well that an aggressive attack upon the evils of society cannot go forward without both an adequate philosophy behind it, and a religious experience to be its dynamic. Rauschenbusch voices this need as it is felt by the exponents of ethical-social Christianity in his chapter "Wanted: A Faith for a Task." [4]

Parallel with this social movement in our Christianity to-day, we recognize another tendency equally characteristic of our time, but not yet drawn into close and helpful relationship with it. This is the interest among Christians to-day in relating their religious faith to the world of scientific discovery. It is all very well to say that the conflict between science and religion is a thing of the past, but actually new problems are continually arising. Not only is the

[4] Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order.*

new physics asking for a new cosmological theory, in a way that brings philosophical challenge to Christian thinkers, but new psychological theories are offering us views of human personality that compel us to weigh again the validity of Christianity's view of human life. The attempt to relate the Christian gospel to the present-day world of scientific thought is one of the major interests of our religious world.

But again, those who take this interest most to heart know that it must not isolate itself as an intellectual movement from the practical interests of religion. Challenging as the intellectual problems of the Christian life are, we know that the pursuit of them cannot fulfill the whole function of religion. Christianity, if it is to meet the needs of our time, must not only have regard for the intellectual relationships that it sustains with the scientific world, but must function actively in the world of practical human relationships, and must minister to the inner life of the heart of man. In treating the limitations of purely scientific inquiry, Professor Eddington leads us to see how true it is in relation to religion that science cannot have the last word. In his *Science and the Unseen World* he notes the queries that inevitably arise when science has presented her data about

the physical world, the queries: What are we to think of it all? What is it all about?

> Why do I not [he says] produce one of these scientific answers now? Simply because before giving an answer, it is usual to listen to the question that is put. It is no use having ready a flawless answer if people will not put to you the question it is intended for. . . . The scientific answer is relevant so far as concerns the sense-impressions interlocked with the stirring of the spirit, which indeed form an important part of the mental content. For the rest the human spirit must turn to the unseen world to which it itself belongs.[5]

If, as Professor Eddington is saying, the data of the physical world are not enough for us to understand ourselves, how true it is that religion must occupy itself, not only with the theories that come from that world of science, but also with the data of that unseen world which is more truly its own province! The effort to relate Christianity to the present-day world of science is one of the finest activities of religion in our time, but it must go forward hand in

[5] Eddington, *Science and the Unseen World*, pp. 41-43.

hand with the more practical work of building a better world for human society, and of ministering to the inner life of the heart. The hungry sheep will look up and will not be fed, unless these interests come into harmonious relationship with each other.

And so it is also in a third clearly marked tendency of the Christianity of our time—that which stresses the values of mystical fellowship with God. That a real revival of mystical religion is taking place to-day is quite apparent. One needs only to mention the names of Professor Otto in Germany, Evelyn Underhill in England, and Professor Rufus Jones in our own country to call to mind how these leaders have been in recent years spokesmen for groups in all three countries who stand for the mystical emphasis in Christianity. That the heart of religion lies in the direct experience of God by the individual is the contention of this school of religious thought. The popular response that has come to this interpretation of religion is in itself testimony to the fact that there was need of this return to the more intimate and personal values of religion. Spontaneous societies like the Spiritual Entente in England, the Confraternity of the Mystical Life in America, as well as smaller groupings within the Student Christian Movement on

both sides of the Atlantic testify to the fact that this emphasis is a needed return to values that in the immediate past have suffered neglect. But again we know all too well by the experience of the past how necessary it is to the healthy development of mystical religion that it should maintain its balance by constant reference to its intellectual foundations and its expression in ethical living.

Rufus Jones in his article, "The Mystic's Experience of God," writing of the tests for the validity of mystical experience, turns to both these fields. Mystical experience of the constructive type leads, he says, to "new moral energy, heightened conviction, increased caloric quality, enlarged spiritual vision, an unusual power of life." [6] In this way it is finding its relation to the world of ethical endeavor. On the other hand, Professor Jones turns to the analogy of a "well-trained disciplined mind," discovering in a sudden flash of imaginative insight a universal law, for his description of what happens in the mystic's experience of God. God is no longer a logical conclusion, an item in a creed, but He has been found, He has been met. The inference is clear, that the logical apprehension

[6] Jones, "The Mystic's Experience of God," *The Atlantic Monthly*, November, 1921.

of Him must lie behind the mystical experience if it is to be of the high order that Professor Jones would commend. The dangers of subjectivism are obviously so great in the mystical type of religious experience, that one clearly needs the balancing goods of sound intellectual foundation and free moral expression.

In all three of these tendencies in our Christian life to-day the need of balance is apparent. We know that ethical Christianity should have the dynamic of personal religion, and the satisfactory working base of a self-respecting theology. We know that theological speculation ought to be saved from barrenness by the warm accompaniments of inner religious experience and outward moral expression. We know that mystical religion needs to be safeguarded from excesses by keeping its relationship true both to sound theological thinking and the outlets of ethical living. But in actual practice this balance is hard to preserve. Dean Inge, one of our most noted advocates of mystical religion, looks with disfavor on democracy. Christian social workers often distrust both theological speculation and the emphasis on personal religion, because they seem to be diverting interest from the immediate and desperate needs of the poor, which to the social worker are the supreme

concern of religion. Theologians stand always in danger of becoming too rationalistic and of being so much preoccupied with the explanation of things, that they neglect that side of religion which concerns itself with changing wrong social conditions or with deepening the inner life.

So it is that, practically speaking, our present-day religious world is a divided world. However much we realize our need for wholeness of view, we fail actually to achieve it. What we need most to-day is a Christianity that gives full place to the intellectual quest for truth, that satisfies the demands of the human heart for an inner experience of God, and that at the same time gives full expression to those impulses in us that reach out for the making of a better world. We want our Christianity to be theologically sound, at home in the present-day world of science and philosophy. We want our Christianity to be dynamic with a sense of the reality of God. We want it to take seriously to heart the task of building the city of God on earth. Not until these three have come to dwell together in unity shall we realize the abundant life in Christian experience.

It is because this is our great need that the Fourth Gospel has so great a gift to make to our

time—its gift of wholeness of view. It gives a sublime expression of Christianity as truth, as love and as inward fellowship with God. As it strove through its use of the Logos doctrine and its emphasis on truth to relate the Christianity of its own time to the world of philosophical value, so it calls us to that task to-day. With its stress on love, it commends to our world, as it did to that of the first century, the basic motive of ethical religion. In its portrayal of Christianity as an experience of oneness with God through Jesus it offers the central value of mystical religion to us to-day, just as it did to Christians in its own time. All three aspects of religion have found harmony with each other in this interpretation of Christianity and all three have been given an artistic expression that has lifted them above the accidents of any one age or of any one type of culture.

It would be folly of course to claim that the Gospel offers to us specific solutions for the intellectual, moral, or religious problems of our day. It has no miraculous power to cross the centuries and answer questions which have arisen since its own day. Only as our needs are those of the age of the Gospel can we expect it to come to us with help. But in remarkable fashion the Gospel turns to that persistent de-

mand of the religious life—wholeness of view. It gives lofty and poetic expression to a well-rounded interpretation of Christianity. Through this Gospel Jesus comes to us to-day as the Way, the Truth and the Life. And of the author of the Gospel we may well say as he said of Jesus, "of his fulness we have all received."

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